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THE

WORKS

OF THE

REV. ANDREW FULLER,

IN EIGHT VOLUMES.

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THE

CALVINISTIC AND SOCINIAN

SYSTEMS

EXAMINED AND COMPARED,

AS TO THEIR

MORAL TENDENCY:

IN A SERIES OF LETTERS, ADDRESSED TO THE FRIENDS OF VITAL AND PRACTICAL RELIGION.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

A POSTSCRIPT,

ESTABLISHING THE PRINCIPLE OF THE WORK AGAINST THE EXCEPTIONS OF DR. TOULMIN, MR. BELSHAM, &c.

Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.
PAUL.

PREFACE.

THE following Letters are addressed to *the friends of vital and practical religion*, because the author is persuaded that the very essence of true piety is concerned in this controversy; and that *godly men* are the only proper judges of divine truth, being the only humble, upright, and earnest inquirers after it. So far from thinking, with Dr. Priestley, that "an unbiassed temper of mind is attained in consequence of becoming more indifferent to religion in general, and to all the modes and doctrines of it;" he is satisfied that persons of that description have a most powerful bias against the truth. Though it were admitted, that false principles, accompanied with a bigoted attachment to them, are worse than none; yet he cannot admit, that irreligious men *are* destitute of principles. He has no notion of human minds being unoccupied or indifferent: he that is not a friend to religion in any mode, is an enemy to it in all modes; he is a libertine; he *doeth evil*, and therefore, *hateth the light*. And shall we compliment such a character, by acknowledging him to be in "a favourable situation for distinguishing between truth and falsehood?"* God forbid! It is *he that doeth his will, that shall know of his doctrine*. The humble, the candid, the upright inquirers after truth, are the persons who are likely to find it; and to them the author takes the liberty to appeal.

The principal occasion of these Letters was, the late union among Protestant Dissenters, in reference to civil affairs, having been the source of various misconception, and, as the writer apprehends, improved as a mean of disseminating Socinian principles.

In the late application to Parliament, for the repeal of the *Cor-*

* Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 95.

poration and Test Acts, the Dissenters have united, without any respect to their doctrinal principles. They considered themselves as applying merely for a *civil* right; and that, in such an application, difference in theological sentiment had no more concern than it has in the union of a nation under one civil head or form of government.

This union, however, has become an occasion of many reflections. Serious men of the Established Church have expressed their surprise, that some Dissenters could unite with others, so opposite in their religious principles; and, had the union been of a *religious* nature, it must, indeed have been surprising. Others have supposed, that the main body of Dissenters had either imbibed the Socinian system, or were hastily approaching towards it. Whether the suggestion of Dr. Horsley, that "the genuine Calvinists, among our modern Dissenters, are very few," has contributed to this opinion, or, whatever be its origin, it is far from being just. Every one who *knows* the Dissenters, knows that the body of them are what is commonly called orthodox. Dr. Priestley, who is well known to be sufficiently sanguine, in estimating the numbers of his party; so sanguine, that, when speaking of the *common people* of this country, he reckons "nine out of ten of them would prefer a Unitarian to a Trinitarian liturgy;"* yet acknowledges, in regard to the Dissenters, that Unitarians are by far the minority. In Birmingham, where the proportion of their number, to the rest of the Dissenters, is greater than in any town in the kingdom, it appears, from Dr. Priestley's account of the matter, that those called orthodox are nearly three to one: and throughout England and Wales, they have been supposed to be "as two, if not as three to one, to the Socinians and Arians inclusive."†

If Dr. Horsley found it necessary, in support of his cause, to overturn Dr. Priestley's assertion, that "great bodies of men do

* Defence of Unitarianism, for 1786, p. 61.

† See Dr. Priestley's Familiar Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham, Letters III. XI. Also, Mr. Parry's Remarks on the Resolutions of the Warwick Meeting.

not change their opinions in a small space of time;" some think he might have found an example more to his purpose, than that of the body of Dissenters having deserted their former principles, in the well-known change of the major part of the Church of England; who, about the time of Archbishop Laud, went off from Calvinism to Arminianism. Had this example been adduced, his antagonist might have found some difficulty in maintaining his ground against him; as it is an undoubted fact, and a fact which he himself acknowledges, with several others of the kind, in the *Third* of his *Familiar Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham.*

The supposition, however, of the Dissenters being generally gone, or going off, to Socinianism, though far from just, has not been without its apparent grounds. The *consequence* which Socinians have assumed, in papers and pamphlets which have been circulated about the country, has afforded room for such a supposition. It has not been very uncommon for them to speak of themselves, as THE DISSENTERS, THE MODERN DISSENTERS, &c. It was said, in a paper that was published more than once, "The ancient, like *the Modern Dissenters, worshipped one God;* they knew nothing of the Nicene or Athanasian creeds." The celebrated authoress of *The Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts*, is not clear in this matter. That otherwise admirable performance is tinged with pride of party consequence. "We thank you, gentlemen," she says, for the compliment paid to DISSENTERS, when you suppose, that the moment they are eligible to places of power and profit, all such places will ot once be filled with them. *We* had not the presumption to imagine, that, inconsiderable as we are in numbers, compared to the Established Church; inferior, too, in fortune and influence; labouring, as we do, under the frowns of the court and THE ANATHEMA OF THE ORTHODOX; we should make our way so readily into to the recesses of royal favour." Even the *Monthly Reviewers*, though they have borne testimony against mingling doctrinal disputes with those of the repeal of the Test laws;* yet, have sometimes spoken of Dissenters and Socin-

* Monthly Review Enlarged, Vol. I. p. 233.

ians, as if they were terms of the same meaning and extent. "It appears to us as absurd," they say, "to charge the religious principles of THE DISSENTERS with republicanism, as it would be to advance the same accusation against the Newtonian philosophy. The doctrine of gravitation may as well be deemed dangerous to the state, as SOCINIANISM."*

Is it unnatural, from such representations as these, for those who know but little of us, to consider the Socinians as constituting the main body of the Dissenters; and the Calvinists as only a few stragglers, who follow these leading men at a distance in all their measures; but whose numbers and consequence are so small, that even the mention of their names among Protestant Dissenters, may very well be omitted?

This, however, as it only affects our reputation, or, at most, can only impede the repeal of the Test laws, by strengthening a prejudice, too strong already, against the whole body of Dissenters, might be overlooked. But this is not all: it is pretty evident, that the union among us, in civil matters, has been improved for the purpose of disseminating religious principles. At one of the most public meetings for the repeal of *the Corporation and Test Acts*, as the author was credibly informed, Socinian peculiarities were advanced, which passed unnoticed, because those of contrary principles did not choose to interrupt the harmony of the meeting, by turning the attention of gentlemen from the immediate object for which they were assembled. What end could Dr. Priestley have, in introducing so much about the Test Act, in his controversy with Mr. Burn, on the person of Christ, except it were to gild the pill, and make it go down the easier with Calvinistic Dissenters?

The writer of these Letters does not blame the Dissenters of his own persuasion for uniting with the Socinians. In civil matters, he thinks it lawful to unite with *men*, be their religious principles what they may: but he, and many others, would be very sorry, if a union of this kind should prove an occasion of abating our zeal for those religious principles which we consider as being of the very essence of the gospel.

* Review for June, 1790, p. 247.

The reason why the term *Socinians* is preferred, in the following Letter, to that of *Unitarians*, is not for the mean purpose of reproach; but because the latter name is not a fair one. The term, as constantly explained by themselves, signifies those professors of Christianity who worship but *one God:* but this is not that wherein they can be *allowed* to be distingushed from others For what professors of Christianity are there, who profess to worship a plurality of Gods? Trinitarians profess also to be Unitarians: They, as well as their opponents, believe there is but *one God.* To give Socinians this name, therefore, *exclusively*, would be granting them the very point which they seem so desirous to take for granted; that is to say, the point in debate.

Names, it may be said, signify little; and this signifies no more on one side, than the term *orthodox* does on the other. The writer owns, that, when he first conceived the idea of publishing these Letters, he thought so; and intended, all along, to use the term Unitarians. What made him alter his mind was, his observing, that the principal writers in that scheme have frequently availed themselves of the above name, and appear to wish to have it thought, by their readers, that the point in dispute between them and the Trinitarian is, Whether there be *three* Gods, or only *one?*

If he had thought the use of the term *Unitarians* consistent with justice to his own argument, he would have preferred it to that of Socinians; and would also have been glad of a term to express the system which he has defended, instead of calling it after the name of Calvin; as he is aware, that calling ourselves after the names of men, (though it be merely to avoid circumlocution,) is liable to be understood as giving them an authority which is inconsistent with a conformity to our Lord's command, *Call no man master upon earth; for one is your master, even Christ.*

He may add, that the substance of the following Letters was written before the riots at Birmingham. His regard to justice and humanity made him feel much, on that occasion, for Dr. Priestley, and others who suffered with him; but his regard to what he esteems important truth made him feel more. The injury which a doctrine receives from those who would support it by the unhallowed hands of plunder and persecution, is far greater in the

esteem of many, than it can receive from the efforts of its avowed adversaries. For his own part, he has generally supposed, that both the contrivers and executors of that iniquitous business, call themselves what they will, were men of *no principle.* If, however, those of the high-church party, who instead of disavowing the spirit and conduct of the misguided populace, have manifestly exulted in it, must be reckoned among the Trinitarians; he has only to say, they are such Trinitarians as he utterly disapproves; and concerning whom he cannot so well express his sentiments and feelings, as in the words of the patriarch: *Instruments of cruelty are in their habitation. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath for it was cruel.*

Detestable, however, as were the riots at Birmingham; no one can plead, that they render the religious principles of Dr. Priestley less erroneous, or less pernicious; or an opposition to them, upon the fair ground of argument, less necessary. On the contrary, the mere circumstance of his being a persecuted man, will have its influence on some people, and incline them not only to feel for the man, the gentleman, and the philosopher; (all which is right; but to think favourably of his religious opinions. On this consideration, if the following Letters would, previous to that event, have been in any degree proper and seasonable; they are not, by any thing that has since occurred, become improper, or unseasonable.

Since the first edition, the author has attempted, in some places, to strengthen his argument, and to remove such objections as have, hitherto occurred. The principal *additions* will be found in Letters IV. and XV. The note, towards the latter end of the former, was occasioned by a report, that Dr. Priestley complained of being *misrepresented* by the quotation in the first page of the Preface. This Note contains a vindication, not only of the fairness of the quotation from Dr. Priestley, but of another, on the same purpose, from Mr. Belsham: and an answer to what is advanced, on its behalf, in the *Monthly Review.*

1802.

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THE

CALVINISTIC AND SOCINIAN SYSTEMS COMPARED.

LETTER I.

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL REMARKS.

Christian Brethren,

MUCH has been written of late years on the Socinian controversy; so much, that the attention of the Christian world has, to a considerable degree, been drawn towards it. There is no reason, however, for considering this circumstance as a matter of wonder, or regret. Not of *wonder:* for supposing the deity and atonement of Christ to be divine truths, they are of such importance in the Christian scheme, as to induce the adversaries of the gospel to bend their main force against them, as against *the rock on which Christ hath built his church.* Not of *regret:* for, whatever partial evils may arise from a full discussion of a subject, the interests of truth will, doubtless, in the end prevail; and the prevalence of truth is a good that will outweigh all the ills that may have attended its discovery. Controversy engages a number of persons of different talents and turns of mind; and, by this means, the subject is likely to be considered in every view in which it is capable of being exhibited to advantage.

The point of light in which the subject will be considered in these letters, namely, *as influencing the heart and life*, has been frequently glanced at on both sides. I do not recollect, however, to have seen this view of it, professedly and separately handled.

In the great controversy in the time of Elijah, recourse was had to an expedient by which the question was decided. Each party built an altar, cut in pieces a bullock, and laid the victim upon the wood, but put no fire under; and the God that should answer by fire, was to be acknowledged as the TRUE GOD. We cannot bring our controversies to such a criterion as this: we may bring them to one, however, which, though not so suddenly, is not much less sensibly evident. The tempers and lives of men are books for common people to read; and they will read them, even though they should read nothing else. They are, indeed, warranted by the scriptures themselves to judge of the nature of doctrines, by their holy or unholy tendency. The true gospel is to be known by its being a *doctrine according to godliness; teaching* those who embrace it *to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in the present world* Those, on the other hand, *who believe not the truth*, are said to *have pleasure in unrighteousness. Profane and vain babblings*, as the ministrations of false teachers are called, *will increase unto more ungodliness;* and their word *will eat as doth a canker.** To this may be added, that the parties themselves, engaged in this controversy, have virtually acknowledged the justice and importance of the above criterion; in that both sides have incidentally endeavoured to avail themselves of it. A criterion, then, by which the common people will judge, by which the scripture authorises them to judge, and by which both sides, in effect, agree to be judged, cannot but be worthy of particular attention.

I feel, for my own part, satisfied, not only of the truth and importance of the doctrines in question, but also of their holy tendency. I am aware, however, that others think differently; and that a considerable part of what I have to advance must be on the defensive.

"Admitting the truth," says Dr. Priestly, "of a trinity of persons in the Godhead, original sin, arbitrary predestination, atonement by the death of Christ, and the plenary inspiration of the scriptures; their *value*, estimated by their influence on the morals

* 1 Tim. vi. 3. Titus ii. 12. 2 Thes. ii. 2. 1 Tim. ii. 16, 17.

of men, cannot be supposed, even by the admirers of them, to be of any moment, compared to the doctrine of the resurrection of the human race to a life of retribution: and, in the opinion of those who reject them, they have a very unfavourable tendency; giving wrong impressions concerning the character and moral government of God, and such as might tend, if they have any effect, to relax the obligations of virtue."*

In many instances Dr. Priestly deserves applause for his frankness and fairness as a disputant: in this passage, however, as well as in some others, the admirers of the doctrines he mentions are unfairly represented. They who embrace the other doctrines, are supposed to hold that of *arbitrary* predestination; but this supposition is not true. The term *arbitrary* conveys the idea of caprice; and, in this connexion denotes, that, in predestination, according to the Calvinistic notion of it, God resolves upon the fates of men, and appoints them to this or that, without any *reason* for so doing. But there is no justice in this representation. There is no decree in the divine mind that we consider as void of reason. Predestination to death is on account of sin; and as to predestination to life, though it be not on account of any works of righteousness which we have done, yet it does not follow that God has no reason whatever for what he does. The sovereignty of God is a *wise*, and not a capricious sovereignty. If he hide the glory of the gospel from the wise and prudent, and reveal it unto babes, it is because *it seemeth good in his sight.* But if it seem *good* in the sight of God, it must, all things considered, be good; for the judgment of God is according to truth.

It is asserted also, that the admirers of the forementioned doctrines cannot, and do not, consider them as of equal importance with that of the resurrection of the human race to a life of retribution. But this, I am satisfied, is not the case: for, whatever Dr. Priestly may think, *they* consider them, or at least some of them, as essential to true holiness; and of such consequence, even to the doctrine of the resurrection of the human race to a life of retribution, that, without them, such a resurrection would be a curse to mankind, rather than a blessing.

* Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever *Part* II. p. 33. 35.

There is one thing, however, in the above passage, wherein we all unite; and this is—that the *value* or *importance* of religious principles is to be estimated by their influence on the morals of men. By this rule let the forementioned doctrines, with their opposites, be tried. If either those or these will not abide the trial, they ought to be rejected.

Before we enter upon a particular examination of the subject, however, I would make three or four general observations.

First, Whatever Dr. Priestly or any others have said of the immoral tendency of our principles, I am persuaded that I may take it for granted, they do not mean to suggest, that we are not good members of civil society, or worthy of the most perfect toleration in the state; nor have I any such meaning in what may be suggested concerning theirs. I do not know any religious denomination of men, who are unworthy of civil protection. So long as their practices do not disturb the peace of society, and there be nothing in their avowed principles inconsistent with their giving security for their good behavior, they, doubtless, ought to be protected in the enjoyment of every civil right to which their fellow-citizens at large are entitled.

Secondly, It is not the bad conduct of a few individuals, in any denomination of Christians, that proves any thing on either side; even though they may be zealous advocates for the peculiar tenets of the party which they espouse. It is the conduct of the *general body*, from which we ought to form our estimate. That there are men of bad character who attend on our preaching, is not denied; perhaps, some of the worst: but if it be so, it proves nothing to the dishonour of our principles. Those, who, in the first ages of Christianity, were not humbled by the gospel, were generally hardened by it. Nay, were it allowed that we have a greater number of *hypocrites* than the Socinians, (as it has been insinuated that the *hypocrisy* and *preciseness*, of some people afford matter of just disgust to speculative Unitarians,) I do not think this supposition any more than the other, dishonourable to our principles. The defect of hypocrites lies not so much in the thing professed, as in the sincerity of their profession. The thing professed may be excellent, and, perhaps, is the more likely

to be so, from its being counterfeited; for it is not usual to counterfeit things of no value. Those persons who entertain low and diminutive ideas of the evil of sin and the dignity of Christ, must, in order to be thought religious by us, counterfeit the contrary; but, among Socinians, the same persons may avow those ideas, and be caressed for it. That temper of mind which we suppose common to men, as being that which they possess by nature, needs not to be disguised among them, in order to be well thought of: they have, therefore, no great temptations to hypocrisy. The question in hand, however, is not—What influence either our principles or theirs have upon persons who do not in reality adopt them? but, What influence they have upon those who do?*

Thirdly, It is not the good conduct of a few individuals, on either side, that will prove any thing. Some have adopted a false creed, and retain it in words, who yet never enter into the spirit of it, and consequently do not act upon it. But merely dormant opinions can hardly be called *principles*: those, rather, seem to be a man's principles, which lie at the foundation of his spirit and conduct. Farther: good men are found in denominations whose principles are very bad; and good men, by whatever names they are called, are more nearly of a sentiment than they are frequently aware of. Take two of them, who differ the most in words, and bring them upon their knees in prayer, and they will be nearly agreed. Besides, A great deal of that which passes for virtue amongst men, is not so in the sight of God, who sees things as they are. It is no more than may be accounted for without bringing

*Though the Socinians be allowed, in what is said above, to have but few hypocrites among them; yet this is to be understood as relating merely to one species of hypocrisy. Dr. Priestly speaking of Unitarians who still continue in the Church of England, says, "from a just aversion to every thing that looks like *hypocrisy* and *preciseness*, they rather lean to the extreme of fashionable dissipation." Yet he represents the same persons, and that in the same page, as "continuing to countenance a mode of worship, which, if they were questioned about it, they could not deny to be according to their own principles, idolatrous and blasphemous, *Discourses on Various Subjects*, p. 96. The hypocrisy, then, to which these gentlemen have so just an adversion, seems to be only of *one* kind.

religion or virtue into the question. There are motives and considerations which will commonly influence men, living in society to behave with decorum. Various occupations and pursuits, especially those of a mental and religious kind, are inconsistent with profligacy of manners. *False apostles*, the very *ministers of Satan*, are said to *transform themselves into the apostles of Christ*, and to *appear as the ministers of righteousness; even as Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.** There are certain vices, which, being inconsistent with others, may be the means of restraining them. Covetousness may be the cause of sobriety; and pride restrains thousands from base and ignoble gratifications, in which, nevertheless, their hearts take secret and supreme delight. A decent conduct has been found in Pharisees, in infidels, nay, even in Atheists. Dr. Priestly acknowledges that "An Atheist may be temperate, good natured, honest, and, in the less-extended sense of the word, *a virtuous man*."† Yet Dr. Priestly would not from hence infer any thing in favour of the moral tendency of Atheism.

Lastly, Neither *zeal* in defence of principles, nor every kind of *devotion* springing from them, will prove those principles to be true, or worthy of God. Several gentlemen, who have gone over from the Calvinistic to the Socinian system, are said to possess greater *zeal* for the propagation of the latter, than thay had used to discover for that of the former. As this, however, makes nothing to the disadvantage of their system, neither does it make any thing to its advantage. This may be owing, for any thing that can be proved to the contrary, to their having found a system more consonant to the bias of their hearts than that was which they formerly professed. And as to *devotion*, a species of this may exist in persons, and that to a higher degree, inconsistent enough with the worst of principles. We know that the gospel had no worse enemies than the *devout and honourable* amongst the Jews.‡ Saul while an enemy to Jesus Christ, was as sincere, as zealous, and as devout in his way, as any of those persons whose sincerity, zeal,

*2 Cor. xi. 13, 15.

† Letters to a philosophical Unbeliever *Part* I. p. 6, *Preface*.

‡Acts. xiii. 50.

and devotion, are frequently held up by their admirers in favour of their cause.

These observations may be thought by some, instead of clearing the subject, to involve it in greater difficulties, and to render it almost impossible to judge of the tendency of principles by any thing that is seen in the lives of men. The subject it is allowed, *has* its difficulties, and the foregoing observations are a *proof* of it: but I hope to make it appear, whatever difficulties may, on these accounts, attend the subject, that there is still enough, in the general spirit and conduct of men, by which to judge of the tendendency of their principles.

I am, &c.

LETTER II.

THE SYSTEMS COMPARED, AS TO THEIR TENDENCY TO CONVERT PROFLIGATES TO A LIFE OF HOLINESS.

Christian Brethren,

You need not be told, that being *born again—created in Christ Jesus—converted—becoming as a little child, &c.* are phrases expressive of a change of heart, which the scriptures make necessary to a life of holiness here, and to eternal life hereafter. It is on this account that I begin with *conversion*, considering it as the commencement of a holy life.

A change of this sort was as really necessary for *Nicodemus*, whose outward character, for ought appears, was respectable, as for *Zaccheus*, whose life had been devoted to the sordid pursuits of avarice. Few, I suppose, will deny this to be the doctrine taught in the New Testament. But, should this be questioned, should the necessity of a change of heart in some characters be denied, still it will be allowed necessary in others. Now, as a change is more conspicuous, and consequently more convincing, in such persons who have walked in an abandoned course, than in those of a more sober life, I have fixed upon the conversion of *profligates*, as a suitable topic for the present discussion.

There are two methods of reasoning which may be used in ascertaining the moral tendency of principles. The first is, by comparing the nature of the principles themselves with the nature of true holiness, and the agreement or disagreement of the one with the other. The second is, by referring to plain and acknowledged facts, judging of the nature of causes by their effects. Both these methods of reasoning, which are usually expressed by the terms *a priori*, and *a posteriori*, will be used in this and the following Letters, as the nature of the subject may admit.

True conversion is comprehended in those two grand topics on which the apostles insisted in the course of their ministry—*Repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.* Let us, then, fix upon these great outlines of the apostolic testimony, and examine which of the systems in question has the greatest tendency to produce them.

Repentance is a *change of mind.* It arises from a conviction that we have been in the wrong ; and consists in holy shame, grief, and self-loathing, accompanied with a determination to forsake every evil way. Each of these ideas is concluded in the acconnt we have of the repentance of Job.* *Behold, I am vile ; what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer ; yea twice, but I will proceed no farther. —I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.* It is essential to such a change as this, that the sinner should realize the evil nature of sin. No man ever yet repented of a fault, without a conviction of its evil nature. Sin must appear *exceedingly sinful,* before we can, in the nature of things, abhor it, and ourselves on account of it. Those sentiments which wrought upon the heart of David, and brought him to repentance, were of this sort. Throughout the fifty-first Psalm, we find him deeply impressed with the evil of sin, and that considered as an offence *against God.* He had injured Uriah and Bathsheba, and, strictly speaking, had not injured God ; the essential honour and happiness of the divine nature being infinitely beyond his reach : yet, as all sin strikes at the divine glory, and actually degrades it in the esteem of creatures, all sin is to be considered, in one view, as committed *against God* : and this view of the subject lay so near his heart as to swallow up every other—*Against* THEE, THEE ONLY *have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight!* It follows, then, that the system which affords the most enlarged views of the evil of sin, must needs have the greatest tendency to promote repentance for it.

Those who embrace the Calvinistic system believe, that man was originally created holy and happy ; that of his own accord he departed from God, and became vile ; that God, being in himself

* Chap, xl. 4. xlii. 6.

infinitely amiable, deserves to be, and is, the moral centre of the intelligent system ; that rebellion against him is opposition to the general good ; that if suffered to operate according to its tendency, it would destroy the well-being of the universe, by excluding God and righteousness, and peace from the whole system ; that, seeing it aims destruction at universal good, and tends to universal anarchy and mischief, it is, in those respects, an infinite evil, and deserving of endless punishment ; and that, in whatever instance God exercises forgiveness, it is not without respect to that public expression of his displeasure against it which was uttered in the death of his Son. These, brethren, are sentiments which furnish us with motives for self-abhorrence : under their influence millions have repented in dust and ashes.

But those, on the other hand, who embrace the Socinian system, entertain diminutive notions of the evil of sin. They consider all evil propensities in men (except those which are accidentally contracted by education or example) as being, in every sense, natural to them ; supposing that they were originally created with them : they cannot, therefore, be offensive to God, unless he could be offended with the work of his own hands for being what he made it. Hence, it may be, Socinian writers, when speaking of the sins of men, describe them in the language of palliation ; language tending to convey an idea of pity, but not of blame. Mr. Belsham, speaking of sin, calls it, " human frailty ;" and the subjects of it, " the frail and erring children of men."* The following positions are for substance maintained by Dr. Priestly, in his treatise on *necessity* : " That, for any thing we know, it might have been as impossible for God to make all men sinless and happy, as to have made them infinite ;" that all the evil there is in sin, arises from its tendency to injure the creature ; that, if God punish sin, it is not because he is so displeased with it as in any case to "take vengeance" on the sinner, sacrificing his happiness to the good of the whole : but, knowing that it tends to do the sinner harm, he puts him to temporary pain, not only for the warning of others, but for his own good, with a view to correct the bad disposition of him ;

* Sermon on the importance of truth, pp. 33, 35.

that what is threatened against sin is of such a trifling account, that it needs not be an object of dread. "No Necessarian," says he, "supposes that any of the human race will suffer eternally; but that future punishments will answer the same purpose as temporal ones are found to do, all of which tend to good, and are evidently admitted for that purpose; so that God, the author of all, is as much to be adored and loved for what we *suffer* as for what we *enjoy*, his *intention* being equally kind in both. And, since God has created us for happiness, what misery can we fear? If we be really intended for ultimate happiness, it is no matter, to a truly resigned person, *when*, or *where*, or *how*."* Sin is so trifling an affair, it seems, and the punishment threatened against it of so little consequence, that we may be quite resigned and indifferent, whether we go immediately to heaven, or whether we first pass through the depths of Hell!

The question at present is not, which of these representations is true or consonant to scripture? but, which has the greatest tendency to promote repentance? If repentance be promoted by a view of the evil of sin, this question, it is presumed, may be considered as decided.

Another sentiment intimately connected with the evil of sin, and equally necessary to promote repentance, is, *The equity and goodness of the divine law.* No man ever truly repented for the breach of a law, the precepts of which he considered as too strict, or the penalties as too severe. In proportion as such an opinion prevails, it is impossible but that repentance must be precluded. Now, the precept of the divine law requires us to love God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves. It allows not of any deviation or relaxation, during the whole of our existence. The penalty by which this holy law is enforced, is nothing less than the curse of Almighty God. But, according to Mr. Belsham, If God "mark and punish *every* instance of transgression," he must be a "*merciless tyrant;*" and we must be "tempted to wish that the reins of universal government were in better hands."† Mr. Belsham, perhaps, would not deny that perfect obedience *is* required by the law, according to the plain mean-

* Pages 118. 122. 65. 149. 150. 128. † Sermon, p. 34.

ing of the words by which it is expressed, or that the curse of God is threatened, against every one that continueth not in *all things* written in the book of the law to do them; but then this rule is so strict, that to "mark and punish every instance," of deviation from it, would be severe and cruel. It seems. then, that God has given us a law, by the terms of which he cannot abide; that justice itself requires him, if not to abate the precept, yet to remit the penalty, and connive at smaller instances of transgression. I need not inquire how much this reflects upon the moral character and government of God. Suffice it at present to say, that such views must of necessity preclude *repentance*. If the law which forbids "every instance" of human folly, be unreasonably strict, and the penalty which threatens the curse of the Almighty on every one that continueth not in *all things* therein written, be indeed cruel; then it must so far be unreasonable for any sinner to be required to repent for the breach of it. On the contrary, God himself should rather repent for making such a law, than the sinner for breaking it!

Faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, is another essential part of true conversion. Faith is credence, or belief. Faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, is belief of the gospel of salvation through his name. A real belief of the gospel is necessarily accompanied with a *trust*, or *confidence* in him for the salvation of our souls. The term *believe* itself sometimes expresses this idea: particularly in 2 Tim. i. 12. *I know whom I have* BELIEVED, *and am persuaded that he is* ABLE TO KEEP THAT WHICH I HAVE COMMITTED UNTO HIM *against that day.* This belief, or trust, can never be fairly understood of a mere confidence in his veracity, as to the truth of his doctrine; for, if that were all, the *ability* of Christ would stand for nothing; and we might as well be said to trust in Peter, or John, or Paul, as in Christ, seeing we believe their testimony to be valid as well as his. Believing, it is granted, does not necessarily, and in all cases, involve the idea of *trust*, for which I here contend; this matter being determined by the nature of the testimony. Neither Peter, nor any of the apostles, ever pretended that their blood, though it might be shed in martyrdom, would be the price of the salvation of sinners. We may, therefore, credit

their testimony, without trusting in them, or *committing* any thing, as Paul expresses it, *into their hands.* But Christ's blood *is* testified of, as the way, and the only way, of salvation. He is said to be *the propitiation for our sins,* and *by himself to have purged our sins—Through his blood we have forgiveness—Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved—Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.** Hence it follows, that to believe his testimony, must of necessity involve in it a trusting in him for the salvation of our souls.

If this be a just representation of faith in Jesus Christ, we cannot be at a loss to decide which of the systems in question has the greatest tendency to promote it; and, as faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ is essential to true conversion, we cannot hesitate in concluding, which has the greatest tendency to turn a sinner from the evil of his ways. Not to mention, at present, how Socinian writers disown an "*implicit belief*" in the testimony of the sacred writers,† and how they lean to their own understanding, as the criterion by which scripture is to be tried; that which I would here insist upon is, That, upon their principles, all *trust*, or *confidence*, in Christ for salvation is utterly excluded. Not only are those principles unadapted to induce us to trust in Christ; but directly tend to turn off our attention and affection from him. Dr. Priestley does not appear to consider him as *the way of a sinner's salvation*, in any sense whatever, but goes about to explain the words of Peter, (Acts iv. 12.) *Neither is there salvation in any other, &c.* not of salvation to eternal life, but "of salvation, or deliverance, from bodily diseases."‡ And another writer of the same cast, (Dr. Harwood) in a Volume of Sermons lately published, treats the sacred writers with still less ceremony. Paul had said, *Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ;* but this writer, as if he designed to affront the Apostle, makes use of his own words in order to contradict him. "Other foundation

* John iv. 10. Heb. i. 3. Ephes. i. 7. Acts iv. 12. 1 Cor. iii. 11

† Dr. Priestley's Defence of Unitarianism, for 1787, p. 66.

‡ Familiar Letters, *Let.* XVI.

than this can no man lay;" says he, "other expectations are visionary and groundless, and all hopes founded upon any thing else than *a good moral life*, are merely imaginary, and contrary to the whole tenor of the gospel."* Whether these things be not aimed to raise the foundation on which the church is built; and whether this be any other than *stumbling at the stumbling-stone*, and a *setting him at naught*, in the great affair for which he came into the world; let every Christian judge. It particularly deserves the serious consideration, not only of the above writers, but of those who are any way inclined to their mode of thinking: for, if it should be so that the death of Christ, as a propitiatory sacrifice, is the only medium through which sinners can be accepted of God; and if they should be found fighting against God, and rejecting the only way of escape, the consequence may be such as to cause the ears of every one that heareth it to tingle. Mean-while, it requires but little penetration to discover, that whatever takes away the only foundation of a sinner's confidence, cannot be adapted to promote it.

Brethren, examine these matters to the bottom, and judge for yourselves, whether you might not as well expect grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles, as to see repentance towards God, or faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, proceeding from Socinian principles.

The foregoing observations serve to show *what may be expected* from the Socinian's doctrine, according to the nature of things: let us next make some inquiry into *matters of fact*. We may judge, from the nature of the seed sown, what will be the harvest; but a view of what the harvest actually is, may afford still greater satisfaction.

First, then, Let it be considered whether Socinian congregations have ever abounded in conversions of the profane to a life of holiness and devotedness to God. Dr. Priestley acknowledges, that "the gospel, when it was first preached by the apostles, produced a wonderful change in the lives and manners of persons of all ages."† Now, if the doctrine which he and others preach be the same, for substance, as that which they preached, one might ex-

* Page 193. † Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever, *Preface*, p. ix.

pect to see some considerable degree of similarity in the effects. But is any thing like this to be seen in Socinian congregations? Has that kind of preaching, which leaves out the doctrines of man's lost condition by nature, and salvation by grace only, through the atonement of Christ; and substitutes, in their place, the doctrine of mercy without an atonement, the simple humanity of Christ, the efficacy of repentance and obedience, &c. . . . . Has this kind of preaching, I say, ever been known *to lay much hold on the hearts and consciences of men?* The way in which that "wonderful change" was effected, in the lives and manners of people, which attended the first preaching of the gospel, was, by the word preached *laying hold on their hearts.* It was a distinguishing mark of primitive preaching, that it *commended itself to every man's conscience.* People could not in general sit unconcerned under it. We are told of some who were *cut to the heart*, and took council to slay the preachers; and of others who were *pricked in the heart*, and said, Men and brethren, what shall we do? But, in both cases, the *heart* was the mark at which the preacher aimed, and which his doctrine actually reached. Has the preaching of the Socinians any such effect as this? Do they so much as expect it should? Were any of their hearers, by any means, to feel pricked in their hearts, and come to them with the question, *What shall we do?* would they not pity them as enthusiasts, and be ready to suspect that they had been among the Calvinists? If any counsel were given, would it not be such as must tend to impede their repentance, rather than promote it; and, instead of directing them to Jesus Christ, as was the practice of the primitive preachers, would they not endeavour to lead them into another course?

Socinian writers cannot so much as *pretend* that their doctrine has been used to convert profligate sinners to the love of God and holiness. Dr. Priestley's scheme will not enable him to account for such changes, where Christianity has ceased to be a *novelty.* The absolute novelty of the gospel when first preached, he represents as the cause of its wonderful efficacy; but in the present age, among persons who have long heard it, and have contracted vicious habits notwithstanding, he looks for no such effects. He confesses himself "less solicitous about the conversion of unbe-

lievers *who are much advanced in life*, than of younger persons; and that, because he despairs of the principles of Christianity having much effect upon the lives of those whose dispositions and habits are already formed."* Sometimes he reckons that the great body of primitive Christians must have been "well-disposed with respect to moral virtue, even before their conversion to Christianity; else," he thinks, "they could not have been so ready to have abandoned their vices, and to embrace a doctrine which required the strictest purity and rectitude of conduct, and even to sacrifice their lives in the cause of truth."† In his treatise on *Philosophical Necessity*,‡ he declares, that, "upon the principles of the Necessarian, all late repentance, and especially after long and confirmed habits of vice, is altogether and necessarily ineffectual; there not being sufficient time left to produce a change of disposition and character, which can only be done by a change of conduct, and of proportionally long continuance."

I confess, I do not perceive the *consistency* of these passages with each other. By the power of *novelty* a wonderful change was produced in the lives and manners of men; and yet the body of them must have been well-disposed with respect to moral virtue: that is, they must have been in such a state as not to need any wonderful change; else they could not have been so ready to abandon their vices. A wonderful change was produced in the lives and manners of men *of all ages;* and yet there is a certain age in which repentance is "altogether and necessarily ineffectual." Inconsistent, however, as these positions may be, one thing is sufficiently evident; namely, That the author considers

* Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever, *Part* II *Preface.* It is true, Dr. Priestley is not here speaking of the profligates among nominal Christians, but of those among avowed Infidels. This, however, makes nothing to the argument. The dispositions and habits of profane nominal Christians are as much formed, as those of avowed Infidels; and their conversion to a holy life is as much an object of despair, as the other. Yea, Dr. Priestley in the same place acknowledges, that "to be mere nominal Christians is worse than to be no Christians at all."

† Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever, *Part* II. pp. 167, 168.

‡ Page 156.

the conversion of profligates, of the present age, as an object of despair. Whatever the Gospel, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, may affirm, that, according to Dr. Priestley, affords but very little, if any, hope to those who in scripture are distinguished by the name of *sinners, chief of sinners*, and *lost*. He does "not expect such conversion of profligate and habitually-wicked men, as shall make any remarkable change in their lives and characters. Their dispositions and habits are already formed, so that it can hardly be supposed to be in the power of new and better principles to change them." It cannot be unnatural, or uncandid, to suppose that these observations were made from *experience;* or that Dr. Priestley writes in this manner on account of his not being used to see any such effects arise from his ministry, or the ministry of those of his sentiments.

There is a sort of preaching, however, even since the days of inspiration, and where Christianity has ceased to be a *novelty*, which has been attended in a good degree, with similar effects to that of the apostles. Whatever was the cause, or however it is to be accounted for, there have been those whose labours have turned *many*, yea, many *profligates*, to righteousness; and that by preaching the very doctrines which Dr. Priestley charges with being the "corruptions of Christianity;" and which a once-humble admirer of his attempted to ridicule.* It is well known what sort of preaching it was that produced such great effects in many nations of Europe, about the time of the Reformation. Whatever different sentiments were professed by the Reformers, I suppose they were so far agreed, that the doctrines of human depravity, the deity and atonement of Christ, justification by faith, and sanctification by the influence of the Holy Spirit, were the great topics of their ministry.

Since the Reformation there have been special seasons in the churches, in which a religious concern has greatly prevailed, and multitudes were turned from their evil ways: some, from an open course of profaneness; and others, from the mere form of godliness to the power of it. Much of this sort of success attended

* See Familiar Letters, *Letter* XXII. P. S.

the labours of Perkins, Bolton, Taylor, Herbert, Hildersham, Blackerby, Gauge, Whitaker, Bunyan, great numbers of the ejected ministers, and many, since their time, in England; of Livingstone, Bruce, Rutherford, M'Cullock, M'Laurin, Robe, Balfour, Sutherland, and others, in Scotland; of Franck and his fellow labourers, in Germany; and of Stoddard, Edwards, Tennant, Buel, and many others in America.* And what Dr. Watts and Dr. Guyse said of the success of Mr. Edwards and some others, in America, might with equal truth have been said of the rest: "That it was the common plain Protestant doctrine of the Reformation, without stretching towards the Antinomians on the one side, or the Arminians on the other, that the Spirit of God had been pleased to honour with such illustrious success.†

Nor are such effects peculiar to past ages. A considerable degree of the same kind of success has attended the Calvinistic churches in North America, within the last ten years; especially in the States of Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia.‡ Nor is it peculiar to the Western world, though they have been greatly favoured. I believe there are hundreds of ministers now in this kingdom, some in the Established Church, and some out of it, who could truly say to a considerable number of their auditors, as Paul said to the Corinthians, *Ye are our epistle, known and read of all men—ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart.* There are, likewise, hundreds of congregations which might with propriety, be addressed in the language of the same Apostle to the same people, *And such were some of you;* (namely, fornicators, adulterers, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners,) *but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified.* And those ministers by whose instrumentality these effects were produced, like their predecessors before-mentioned, have dwelt principally on the Protestant doctrines, of man's lost condition by nature, and salvation by

* See Gillies' Historical Collections.

† Preface to Mr. Edwards' Narrative.

‡ See Rippon's Baptist Register, for 1790, *Parts* I, II.

grace only, through the atoning blood of Christ; together with the necessity of the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit. When therefore, they see such effects attend their labours, they think themselves warranted to ascribe them, as the Apostle did, *to the name of the Lord Jesus, and to the Spirit of our God.*"*

The solid and valuable effects produced by this kind of preaching are attested by the late Mr. Robinson of Cambridge, as well as by Dr. Watts and Dr. Guyse. "Presumption and despair," said that ingenious writer, "are the two dangerous extremes to which mankind are prone in religious concerns. Charging home sin precludes the first, proclaiming redemption prevents the last. This has been the method which the Holy Spirit has thought fit to seal and succeed in the hands of his ministers. Wickliffe, Luther, Knox, Latimer, Gilpin, Bunyan, Livingstone, Franck, Blair, Elliot, Edwards, Whitefield, Tennant, and all who have been eminently blessed to the revival of *practical godliness*, have constantly availed themselves of this method; and, prejudice apart, it is impossible to deny, that great and excellent moral effects have followed."†

Should it be alleged, that Mr. Robinson, before he died, changed his opinions in these matters, and reckoned all such things as these *enthusiasm;* it might be answered, A change of opinion in Mr. Robinson can make no change in the "facts," as he justly calls them, which he did himself the honour to record. Besides, the effects of this kind of preaching are not only recorded by Mr. Robinson, but by those who triumph in his conversion to their principles. Dr. Priestley professes to think highly of the Methodists, and acknowledges that they have "civilized and Christianized a great part of the uncivilized and unchristianized part of this country."‡ Also, in his *Discourses on Various Subjects*, he allows their preaching to produce "more striking effects" than that of Socinians, and goes about to account for it.§

* 2 Cor. iii. 2, 3. 1 Cor. vi. 12.

† Translation of Claude, Vol. II. p. 364, *Note.*

Familiar Letters, *Letter* VII.

§ Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 375.

A matter of fact, so notorious as this, and of so much consequence in the controvesy, requires to be well accounted for. Dr. Priestley seems to have felt the force of the objection that might be made to his principles on this ground; and therefore attempts to obviate it. But by what medium is this attempted? The same principle by which he tries to account for the wonderful success of the gospel in the primitive ages, is to account for the effects produced by such preaching as that of the Methodists; *The ignorance of their auditors giving what they say to them the force of* NOVELTY. The Doctor is pleased to add, "Our people having in general been brought up in habits of virtue, such great changes in character and conduct are less necessary in their case."*

A few remarks in reply to the above shall close this Letter. First, If novelty be indeed that efficacious principle which Dr. Priestley makes it to be, one should think it were desirable, every century or two, at least, to have a new dispensation of religion.

Secondly, If the great success of the primitive preachers was owing to this curious cause, is it not extraordinary, that they themselves should never be acquainted with it, nor communicate a secret of such importance to their successors? They are not only silent about it, but in some cases, appear to act upon a contrary principle. Paul, when avowing the subject matter of his ministry before Agrippa, seemed to disclaim every thing *novel;* declaring, that he had said *none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come.* And as to the cause of their success, they seem never to have thought of any thing but *the hand of the Lord* that *was with them—The working of his mighty power—Who caused them to triumph in Christ, making manifest the savour of his knowledge by them in every place.*†

Thirdly, If novelty be what Dr. Priestley makes it to be, the plea of Dives had much more of truth in it than the answer of Abraham. He pleaded, that *if one rose from the dead, men would repent*: the novelty of the thing, he supposed, must strike them. But Abraham answered, as if he had no notion of the pow-

* Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 375.

† Acts xii. 21. Ephes. i. 19. 2 Cor. ii. 14

er of mere novelty, *If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.*"

Fourthly, If the success of the apostles was owing to the novelty of their mission, it might have been expected, that, at Athens, where a taste for *hearing and telling of new things* occupied the whole attention of the people, their success would have been the greatest. Every body knows that a congeniality of mind in an audience, to the things proposed, wonderfully facilitates the reception of them. Now, as the Gospel was as much of a novelty to them as to the most barbarous nations, and as they were possessed of a peculiar turn of mind, which delighted in every thing of that nature, it might have been expected, on the above hypothesis, that a harvest of souls would there have been gathered in. But, instead of this, the gospel is well known to have been less successful in this famous city than in many other places.

Fifthly, Some of the most striking effects, both in early and latter ages, were not accompanied with the circumstance of novelty. The sermon of Peter to the inhabitants of Jerusalem* contained no *new* doctrine ; it only pressed upon them the same things, for substance, which they had heard and rejected from the lips of Christ himself; and on a pre-judgment of the issue by the usual course of things, they would probably have been considered as more likely to reject Peter's doctrine than that of Christ ; because when once people have set their hands to a business, they are generally more loth to relinquish it and own themselves in the wrong, than at first to forbear to engage in it And, as to latter times, the effects produced by the preaching of Whitefield, Edwards and others, were many of them upon people not remarkably ignorant, but who had attended preaching of a similar kind all their lives without any such effect. The *former*, it is well known, preached the same doctrines in Scotland and America, as the people were used to hear every Lord's day ; and that with great effect among persons of a lukewarm and careless description. The *latter* in his *Narrative of the work of God in and about Northampton*, represents the inhabitants as having been " a rational and understanding people." Indeed, they must have been such

*Acts ii.

or they could not have understood the compass of argument contained in Mr. Edwards' *Sermons on Justification*, which were delivered about that time, and are said to have been the means of great religious concern among the hearers. Nor were these effects produced by airs and gestures, or any of those extraordinary things in the manner of the preacher, which give a kind of novelty to a sermon, and sometimes tend to move the affections of the hearers. Mr. Prince, who, it seems, had often heard Mr. Edwards preach, and observed the remarkable conviction which attended his ministry, describes, in his *Christian history*, his manner of preaching. "He was a preacher," says he, "of a low and moderate voice, a natural delivery, and without any agitation of body, or any thing else in the manner to excite attention, except his habitual and great solemnity, looking and speaking as in the presence of God, and with a weighty sense of the matter delivered."*

Sixthly, Suppose the circumstance of Novelty to have great efficacy, the question is, with respect to such preaching as that of the Methodists, whether it has efficacy enough to render *the truth of the doctrine* of no account? It is well known that the main doctrines which the Methodists have taught, are, *Man's lost condition by nature, and salvation by the atonement of Christ*: but these, according to Dr. Priestly, are false doctrines; no part of Christianity, but the "corruptions" of it; and "such as must tend, if they have any effect, to relax the obligations to virtue." But, if so, how came it to pass that the preaching of them should "civilize and Christianize mankind?" Novelty may do wonders, it is granted; but still the nature of those wonders will correspond with the nature of the principles taught. All that it can be supposed to do is to give additional energy to the principles which it accompanies. The heating of a furnace seven times hotter than usual, would not endure it with the properties of water; and water put into the most powerful motion, would not be capable of producing the effects of fire. One would think, it were equally evident, that falsehood,

*Gillies's Historical Collections, Vol. II. p. 196.

though accompanied with novelty, could never have the effect of truth.

Once more : It may be questioned, whether the generality of people who make up Socinian congregations stand in less need of a change of character and conduct than others ? Mr. Belsham says, that " rational Christians are often represented as indifferent to practical religion ; and admits though with apparent reluctance, that " there has been some plausible ground for the accusation." Dr. Priestley admits the same thing, and they both go about to account for it in the same way.* Now, whether their method of accounting for it be just, or not, they admit the fact ; and from hence we may conclude, that the generality of " rational Christians" are not so righteous as to need no repentance ; and that the reason why their preaching does not turn sinners to righteousness, is not owing to their want of an equal proportion of sinners to be turned.

But supposing the Socinian congregations were generally so virtuous as to need no great change of character ; or if they did, so well informed that nothing could strike them as a novelty ; that is not the case with the bulk of mankind amongst whom they live. Now, if a great change of character may be produced by the mere power of novelty, why do not Dr. Priestley and those of his sentiments go forth, like some others to *the highways and hedges?* Why does he not surprise the benighted populace into the love of God and holiness, with his *new* doctrines ? (New he must acknowledge, they are to them.) If false doctrine, such as that which the Methodists have taught, may, through the power of novelty, do such wonders, what might not be expected from the true ? I have been told that Dr. Priestley has expressed a wish to go into the streets and preach to the common people. Let him or those of his sentiments, make the trial. Though the people of Birmingham have treated him so uncivilly, I hope both he and they would meet with better treatment in other parts of the country ; and if by the power of novelty they can turn but a few sinners from the error of their ways, and save their souls from death, it will be an object worthy of their attention.

* Mr. Belsham's Sermon, p. 32. Dr. Priestley's Discourses on various subjects, p. 95.

But, should Dr. Priestley, or any others of his sentiments, go forth on such an errand, and still retain their principles, they must reverse the declaration of our Lord, and say, *We come not to call sinners, but the righteous to repentance* All their hope must be in the uncontaminated youth, or the better sort of people, whose habits in the path of vice are not so strong but that they may be overcome. Should they, in the course of their labours, behold a malefactor approaching the hour of his execution, what must they do? Alas! like the priest and the levite, they must *pass by on the other side.* They could not so much as admonish him to repentance, with any degree of hope; because they consider "all late repentance, and especially after long and confirmed habits of vice, as absolutely and necessarily ineffectual."* Happy for many a poor wretch of that description, happy especially for the poor thief upon the cross, that Jesus Christ acted on a different principle.

These brethren are matters that come within the knowledge of every man of observation; and it behoves you, in such cases, to know *not the speech of them that are puffed up, but the power.*

I am, &c.

* See Dr. Priestley's Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 238. Also his Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity, p. 156.

LETTER III.

THE SYSTEMS COMPARED AS TO THEIR TENDENCY TO CONVERT PROFESSED UNBELIEVERS.

Christian Brethren,

SOCINIAN writers are very sanguine on the tendency of their views of things to convert Infidels; namely, Jews, Heathens, and Mahometans. They reckon that our notions of the Trinity form the grand obstacle to their conversion. Dr. Priestley often suggests, that so long as we maintain the Deity of Jesus Christ, there is no hope of converting the Jews, because this doctrine contradicts the first principle of their religion, *the Unity of God.* Things, not altogether, but nearly similar, are said concerning the conversion of the Heathens and Mahometans, especially the latter. On this subject, the following observations are submitted to your consideration.

With respect to the *Jews*, they know very well, that those who believe in the Deity of Christ, *profess* to believe in the unity of God; and if *they* will not admit this to be consistent, they must depart from what is plainly implied in the language of their ancestors. If the Jews in the time of Christ had thought it impossible, or, which is the same thing, inconsistent with the unity of God, that God the Father should have a Son equal to himself, How came they to attach the idea of *equality* to that of Sonship? Jesus asserted that God was his *own Father;* which they understood as making himself *equal with God;* and therefore sought to kill him as a blasphemer.* Had the Jews affixed those ideas to sonship which are entertained by our opponents; namely, as implying nothing more than simple humanity, why did they accuse Jesus of blasphemy for assuming it? they did not deny, that to be God's *own Son* was to be equal with the Father; nor did they allege

* John v. 18.

that such an equality would destroy the divine unity: a thought of this kind seems never to have occurred to their minds. The idea to which they objected was, *That Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God;* and hence, it is probable, the profession of this great article was considered in the apostolic age as the criterion of Christianity.* Were this article admitted by the modern Jews, they must reason differently from their ancestors, if they scrupled to admit that Christ is equal with the Father.

The Jews were greatly offended at our Lord's words; and his not explaining them so as to remove the stumbling-block out of the way, may serve to teach us how we ought to proceed in removing stumbling-blocks out of the way of their posterity. *For this cause they sought to kill him--because he had said that God was his Father,* MAKING HIMSELF EQUAL WITH GOD.—*Jesus said, I and my Father are one. Then they took up stones to stone him.* When he told them of *many good works that he had shown them,* and asked, *For which of those works do ye stone me?* They replied, *For a good work we stone thee not, but for blasphemy; and because thou,* BEING A MAN MAKEST THYSELF GOD.† From hence it is evident, that whether Jesus Christ be truly God, or not, they understood him as asserting that he *was* so; that is; they understood his claiming the relation of *God's own Son,* and declaring that *He and his Father were one,* as implying so much. This was their stumbling-block. Nor does it appear that Jesus did any thing towards removing it out of their way. It is certain he did not so remove it, as to afford them the least satisfaction: for they continued to think him guilty of the same blasphemy to the last, and, for that, adjudged him worthy of death‡ If Jesus *never thought of being equal with God,* it is a pity there should have been such a misunderstanding between them; a misunderstanding that proved the occasion of putting him to death!

Such an hypothesis, to be sure, may answer one end; it may give us a more favourable idea of the conduct of the Jews than we have been wont to entertain. If it does not entirely justify their procedure, it greatly extenuates it. They erred, it seems, in imagining, that Jesus, by declaring himself *the Son of God,* made himself *equal with God;* and thus, through mistaking his meaning, put him to death as a blasphemer. But, then, it might be pleaded

* Acts viii. 37. † John v. 18, 10, 30, 33. ‡ Matthew xxvi. 63, 66.

on their behalf, that Jesus never suggested that they were in an error in this matter; that, instead of informing them that the name *Son of God* implied nothing more than simple humanity, he went on to say, among other things, *That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father.* And, instead of disowning with abhorrence the idea of making himself *God,* he seemed to justify it, by arguing from the less to the greater—from the image of the thing to the thing itself.* Now, these things considered, should an impartial jury sit in judgment upon their conduct, one would think they could not, with Stephen, bring it in *murder;* to make the most of it, it could be nothing worse than manslaughter. All this may tend to conciliate the Jews; as it tends to roll away the reproach which, in the esteem of Christians, lies upon their ancestors for crucifying the Lord of glory: but whether it will have any influence towards their conversion, is another question. It is possible, that, in proportion as it confirms their good opinion of their forefathers, it may confirm their ill opinion of Jesus, for having, by his obscure and ambiguous language, given occasion for such a misunderstanding between them. Could the Jews but once be brought to feel that temper of mind, which it is predicted in their own prophets they shall feel; could they but *look on him whom they have pierced, and mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son, and be in bitterness for him as one that is in bitterness for his first-born;* I should be under no apprehensions respecting their acknowledging his proper divinity, or embracing him as the great atonement, to the *fountain* of whose blood they would joyfully repair, that they might be cleansed from their sin and their uncleanness.†

Nearly the same things might be observed respecting *Heathens* and *Mahometans.* We may so model the gospel, as almost to accommodate it to their taste: and by this means we may come nearer together; but whether, in so doing, we shall not be rather converted to them, than they to us, deserves to be considered. Christianity may be so heathenized, that a man may believe in it, and yet be no Christian. Were it true, therefore, that Socinianism had a tendency

* John v. 18. and x. 34, 36.

† Zech. xii. 10, 14. xiii. 1.

to induce professed Infidels, by meeting them, as it were, half-way, to take upon them the Christian name ; still it would not follow, that it was of any real use. The Popish Missionaries, of the last century, in China, acted upon the principle of accommodation : they gave up the main things in which Christians and Heathens had been used to differ, and allowed the Chinese every favourite species of idolatry. The consequence was, they had a great many converts, such as they were ; but thinking people looked upon the Missionaries as more converted to Heathenism, than the Chinese Heathens to Christianity.*

But even this effect is more than may be expected from Socinian doctrines among the Heathen. The Popish Missionaries had engines to work with which Socinians have not. They were sent by an authority, which, at that time, had weight in the world ; and their religion was accompanied with pomp and superstition. These were matters, which though far from recommending their mission to the approbation of serious Christians, yet would be sure to recommend it to the Chinese. They stripped the gospel of all its *real* glory, and, in its place, substituted a *false* glory. But Socinianism, while it divests the gospel of all that is interesting and affecting to the souls of men, substitutes nothing in its place. If it be Christianity at all, it is, as the ingenious Mrs. Barbauld is said in time past to have expressed it, "Christianity in the frigid zone." It may be expected ,therefore, that no considerable number of professed Infidels will ever think it worthy of their attention. Like *the Jew*, they will pronounce every attempt to convert them by these accommodating principles *nugatory ;* and be ready to ask, with him, *What they shall do more, by embracing Christianity, than they already do?* †

Dr. Priestly, however, is for *coming to action.* "Let a free intercourse be opened," says he, "between Mahometans and Rational, that is, Unitarian Christians,‡ and I shall have no doubt with

* Millor's *Propagation of Christianity*, Vol. II, pp. 388 438.

† Mr. Levi's *Letters to Dr. Priestley*, pp. 76,77.

‡ "Rational, that is, Unitarian Christians."— Why need Dr. Priestley be so particular in informing his reader that a *Rational* Christian signifies an *Unita-*

respect to the consequence." And again. "Let the Hindoos, as well as the Mahometans, become acquainted with our literature, and have free intercourse with *Unitarian Christians*, and I have no doubt but the result will be in favour of Christianity."* So, then, when Heathens and Mahometans are to be converted, Trinitarians, like those of Gideon's army that bowed down their knees to drink, must sit at home ; and the whole of the expedition, it seems, must be conducted by Unitarians, as by the three hundred men that lapped. Poor Trinitarians ; deemed unworthy of an intercourse with Heathens ! Well ; if you must be denied, as by a kind of *Test Act*, the privilege of bearing arms in this divine war, surely you have a right to expect, that those who shall be possessed of it, should act valiantly, and do exploits. But what ground have you on which to rest your expectations ?—none, except Dr. Priestley's good conceit of his opinions. When was it known, that any considerable number of Heathens or Mahometans were converted by the Socinian doctrine ? Sanguine as the Doctor is on this subject, where are the *facts* on which his expectations are founded ?

Trinitarians, however, whether Dr. Priestly think them worthy, or not, have gone among the Heathens, and that not many years ago, and preached what they thought the gospel of Christ ; and, I may add, from facts that cannot be disputed, with considerable success. The *Dutch*, the *Danes* and the *English*, have each made some attempts in the East, and I hope, not without some good effects. If we were to call that conversion, which many professors of Christianity would call so without any scruple, we might boast of the conversion of a great many thousands in those parts. But it is acknowledged, that many of the conversions in the East were little,

rian Christian ? To be sure, all the world knew, long enough ago, that *rationality* was confined to the Unitarians ! Doubtless, they are the people, and wisdom will die with them ! When Dr. Priestley speaks of persons of his own sentiments, he calls them "*Rational Christians*;" when, in the same page, speaking of such as differ from him, he calls them "those who *assume* to themselves the distinguishing title of Orthodox." *Considerations on difference of Opinion*, § 3. Query. Is the latter of these names *assumed*, any more than the former ; and, Is Dr. Priestley a fit person to reprove a body of people for assuming a name which implies what their adversaries do not admit ?

* Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever, *Part* II. pp. 116,117.

if any thing, more than a change of denomination. The greatest and best work, and the most worthy of the name of conversion, of which I have read, is that which has taken place by the labours of the Anglo-Americans among the natives. They have, indeed, wrought wonders. Mr. Elliot, the first minister who engaged in this work, went over to New-England in 1632; and, being warmed with a holy zeal for converting the natives, learned their language, and preached to them in it. He also, with great labour, translated the Bible, and some English treatises, into the same language. God made him eminently useful for the turning of these poor Heathens to himself. He settled a number of Christian churches, and ordained elders over them, from among themselves. After a life of unremitted labour in this important undertaking, he died in a good old age, and has ever since been known, both among the English and the natives, by the name of *The Apostle of the American Indians.*

Nor were these converts like many of those in the East, who professed they knew not what, and, in a little time, went off again as fast as they came: the generality of them understood and felt what they professed, and persevered to the end of their lives. Mr. Elliot's example stimulated many others: some in his lifetime, and others after his death, laboured much, and were blessed to the conversion of thousands among the Indians. The names and labours of Bourn, Fitch, Mayhew, Pierson, Gookin, Thatcher, Rawson, Treat, Tupper, Cotton, Walter, Sargeant, Davenport, Park, Horton, Brainerd and Edwards, are remembered with joy and gratitude in those benighted regions of the earth. Query, Were ever any such effects as these wrought by preaching Socinian doctrines?

Great things have been done among the Heathen, of late years, by the *Moravians.* About the year 1733, they sent Missionaries to *Greenland*—a most inhospitable country indeed, but containing about ten thousand inhabitants, all enveloped in Pagan darkness. After the labour of several years apparently in vain, success attended their efforts; and, in the course of twenty or thirty years, about seven hundred Heathens are said to have been baptized,

and to have lived the life of Christians.* They have done great good also in the most northern parts of North-America, among the *Esquimaux;* and still more among the Negroes in the West India islands; where at the close of 1788, upwards of *thirteen thousand* of those poor, injured, and degraded people, were formed into Christian societies. The views of Moravians, it is true, are different from ours in several particulars, especially in matters relating to church government and discipline: but they appear to possess a great deal of godly simplicity; and as to the doctrines which they inculcate, they are mostly, what we esteem evangelical. The doctrine of atonement by the death of Christ, in particular, forms the great subject of their ministry. The first person in Greenland who appeared willing to receive the gospel, was an old man who came to the missionaries for instruction. "We told him," say they "as well as we could, of the creation of man, and the intent thereof—of the fall and corruption of nature—of the redemption effected by Christ—of the resurrection of all men, and eternal happiness or damnation." They inform us, afterwards, that the doctrine of the cross, or "the Creator's taking upon him human nature, and dying for our sins," was the most powerful means of impressing the minds of the Heathen, and of turning their hearts to God. "On this account," they add, "we determined, like Paul, to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

Now consider, brethren, were there ever any such effects as the above wrought by the Socinian doctrine? If there were, let them be brought to light. Nay, let a single instance be produced of a Socinian teacher having so much virtue or benevolence in him, as to make the the attempt; so much virtue or benevolence, as to venture among a race of barbarians, merely with a view to their conversion.

But we have unbelievers at home: and Dr. Priestley persuaded of the tendency of his principles to convert, has lately made some experiments upon them, as being within his reach. He has done well. There is nothing like *experiment* in religion as well as in philosophy. As to what tendency his sentiments *would have* upon Heathens and Mahometans, provided a free intercourse could be

* See Crantz's History of Greenland.

obtained, it is all conjecture. The best way to know their efficacy, is by *trial;* and trial has been made. Dr. Priestley has addressed *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever*, and *Letters to the Jews.* Whether this seed will spring up, it is true, we must not yet decide. Some little time after he had published, however, he himself acknowledged, "I do not know that my book has converted a single unbeliever."* Perhaps, he might say the same still: and that, not only of his *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever*, but of those *to the Jews.*

If the opinion of the Jews may, in any degree, be collected from the answer of their champion, *Mr. David Levi*, so far are they from being convinced of the truth of Christianity by Dr. Priestley's writings, that they suspect whether he himself be a Christian. "Your doctrine," says Mr. Levi, "is so opposite to what I always understood to be the principles of Christianity, that I must ingeniously confess I am greatly puzzled to reconcile your principles to the attempt. What! a writer that asserts that *the miraculous conception of Jesus does not appear to him to be sufficiently authenticated, and that the original Gospel of St. Matthew did not contain it*, set up for a defender of Christianity against the Jews, is such an inconsistency as I did not expect to meet with in a philosopher, whose sole pursuit has been in search of truth! You are pleased to declare, in plain terms, *that you do not believe in the miraculous conception of Jesus*, and that you *are of opinion that he was the legitimate son of Joseph.* After such assertions as these, how you can be entitled to the appellation of 'a Christian,' in the strict sense of the word, is to me really incomprehensible. If I am not greatly mistaken, I verily believe that the honour of Jesus, or the propagation of Christianity, are things of little moment in your serious thoughts, notwithstanding all your boasted sincerity."† To say nothing of the opinion of the Jews *concerning what is Christianity* having all the weight that is usually attributed to the judgment of impartial by-standers, the above quotations afford but little reason to hope for their conversion to Christianity by Socinian doctrines.

* Letters to Mr. Hammon.

† Mr. David Levi's Letters to Dr. Priestley.

But still, it may be said, We know not what is to come. True: but this we know, that if any considerable fruit arise from the Addresses above referred to, *it is yet to come;* and not from these Addresses only, but I am inclined to think, from any thing that has been attempted by Socinians for the conversion of unbelievers.

Is it not a fact, that Socinian principles render men indifferent to this great object, and even induce them to treat it with contempt? The *Monthly Reviewers*, in reviewing *Mr. Carey's* late publication on this subject, infer from his acknowledgements of the baneful influence of *wicked* Europeans in their intercourse with Heathens, and the great corruptions among the various denominations of professing Christians, that, if so, "far better is the light of nature, as communicated by their Creator, than any light that our officiousness disposes us to carry to them"* By Europeans who have communicated their vices to Heathens; Mr. Carey undoubtedly meant, not those ministers of the gospel, or those serious Christians, who have gone among them for their good; but navigators merchants and adventurers, whose sole object was to enrich themselves: and, though he acknowledges a great deal of degeneracy and corruption, to have infected the Christian world, yet the qualifications which he requires in a missionary might have secured his proposal from censure, and doubtless would have done so, had not the Reviewers been disposed to throw cold water upon every such undertaking. If, indeed, there be none to be found among professing Christians, except such who, by their intercourse with Heathens, would only render their state worse than it was before, let the design be given up: but if otherwise, the objection is of no force.

The Reviewers will acknowledge, that great corruptions have attended the civil government of Europe, not excepting that of our own country; and that we are constantly engaged in dissensions on the subject: yet I have no doubt but they could find certain individuals who, if they were placed in the midst of an uncivilized people, would be capable of affording them substantial assistance—would teach them to establish good laws, good order, and equal

*Monthly Review, for Dec. 1792, p. 447.

liberty. Nor would they think of concluding, because European conquerors and courtiers, knowing no higher motive than self-interest, instead of meliorating the condition of uncivilized nations, have injured it, that therefore it was vain for any European to think of doing otherwise. Neither would they regard the sneers of the enemies of civil liberty and equity, who might deride them as a *little flock* of conceited politicians, or, at best, of inexperienced philanthropists, whose plans might amuse in the closet, but would not bear in real life. Why is it that we are to be sceptical and inactive in nothing but religion?

Had Mr. Carey, after the example of Dr. Priestley, proposed that his *own denomination only* should open an intercourse with Heathens, the Reviewers would have accused him of *illibebarality;* and now, when he proposes that "other denominations should engage separately in promoting missions," this, it is said, would be "spreading our religious dissensions over the globe." How, then, are these gentlemen to be pleased? By sitting still, it should seem, and persuading ourselves that it is impossible to find out what is true religion; or, if not, that it is but of little importance to disseminate it. But why is it, I again ask, that we are to be sceptical and inactive in nothing but religion? The result is this: Socinianism, so far from being friendly to the conversion of unbelievers, is neither adapted to the end, nor favourable to the means —to those means, however, by *which it has pleased God to save them that believe.*

I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

THE ARGUMENT, FROM THE NUMBER OF CONVERTS TO SOCINIANISM, EXAMINED.

Christian Brethren,

If *facts* be admitted as evidence, perhaps it will appear that Socinianism is not so much adapted to make converts of Jews, Heathens, Mahometans, or Philosophical Unbelievers, as of a speculating sort of people among professing Christians. These in our own country are found, some in the Established Church, and some among the Dissenters. Among people of this description, I suppose, Socinianism has gained considerable ground. Of this, Dr. Priestley, and others of his party are frequently making their boast.* But whether they have any cause for boasting, even in this case may be justly doubted.

In the first place let it be considered, that, though Socinianism may gain ground among speculating *individuals*, yet the congregations where that system, or what bears a near resemblance to it, is taught, are greatly upon the decline. There are, at this time, a great many places of worship in this kingdom, especially among the *Presbyterians* and the *General Baptists*, where the Socinian and Arian doctrines have been taught till the congregations are gradually dwindled away, and there are scarcely enough left to keep up the form of worship. There is nothing in either of these systems, comparatively speaking, that alarms the conscience, or interests the heart; and therefore the congregations where they are taught, unless kept up by the accidental popularity of a preacher or some other circumstance distinct from the doctrine delivered, generally fall into decay.

* Discourses on Various Subjects, pp. 93, 94,

But, farther let us examine a little more particularly, what sort of people, they, in general, are, who are converted to Socinianism. It is an object worthy of inquiry, whether they appear to be modest, humble, serious Christians, such as have known the plague of their own hearts; such in whom tribulation hath wrought patience, and patience experience; such who know WHOM they have believed and who have learned to count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord; such who, in their investigation of sentiments, have been used to mingle earnest and humble prayer with patient and impartial inquiry; such, in fine, who have become as little children in their own eyes? *If, they be*, it is a circumstance of consequence, not sufficient, indeed to justify their change of sentiments, but to render that change an object of attention. When persons of this description embrace a set of new principles, it becomes a matter of serious consideration, what could induce them to do so. *But if they be not*, their case deserves but little regard. When the body of converts to a system are mere speculatists in religion, men of little or no seriousness, and who pay no manner of attention to vital and practical religion, it reflects neither honour on the cause they have espoused, nor dishonour on that which they have rejected. When we see persons of this stamp go over to the Socinian standard, it does not at all surprise us: on the contrary, we are ready to say, as the Apostle said of the defection of some of the professors of Christianity in his day, *They went out from us, but they were not of us.*

That many of the Socinian converts were previously men of no serious religion, needs no other proof than the acknowledgment of Dr. Priestley, and of Mr. Belsham. "It cannot be denied," says the former, "that many of those who judge so truly concerning particnlar tenets in religion, have attained to that cool and unbiassed temper of mind in consequence of becoming more indifferent to religion in general, and to all the modes and doctrines of it." And this indifference to *all religion* is considered by Dr. Priestley as "favourable to a distinguishing between truth and falsehood."* Much to the same purpose is what Mr. Belsham alleges, as quoted before, that "Men who are most indifferent to the *practice* of religion, and whose

* Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 65.

minds, therefore are least attached to any set of principles, will ever be the first to see the absurdity of a popular superstition, and to embrace a rational system of faith."* It is easy to see, one should think from hence, what sort of characters those are, which compose the body of Socinian converts.

Dr. Priestley, however, considers this circumstance as reflecting no dishonour upon his principles. He thinks he has fully accounted for it. So thinks Mr. Belsham; and so think the Monthley Reviewers, in their Review of Mr. Belsham's Sermon.†

Surely Socinians must be wretchedly driven, or they would not have recourse to such a refuge as that of acknowledging that they hold a gospel, the best preparative for which is a being *destitute of all religion!* "What a reflection is here implied," says Dr. Williams, "on the most eminent reformers of every age, who were the first to see the absurdities of a popular superstition, and the falsity of reigning principles! What a poor compliment to the religious character of Unitarian reformers! According to this account, one might be tempted to ask, Was it by being indifferent to the

* Sermon on the Importance of Truth, p. 32.

† I have not scrupled to class the Monthly Reviewers among Socinians. Although in a work of that kind there be frequently, no doubt, a change of hands; yet it is easy to see, that, of late years, (a very short interval excepted,) it has been principally, if not entirely, under Socinian direction; and, so far as relgion is concerned, has been used as an instrument for the propagation of that system. Impartiality towards Calvinistic writers is not, therefore, to be expected from that quarter. It is true, they sometimes affect to stand aloof from all parties: but it is mere *affectation*. Nothing can be more absurd than to expect them to judge impartially in a cause wherein they themselves are parties: absurd, however as it is, some persons are weak enough to be imposed upon by their pretences. Perhaps, of late years, the Monthly Review has more contributed to the spreading of Socinianism, than all other writings put together. The plan of that work does not admit of *argumentation;* a sudden flash of wit is generally reckoned sufficient to discredit a Calvinistic performance; and this just suits the turn of those who are *destitute of all religion*. A laborious investigation of matters would not suit their temper of mind: they had rather subscribe to the well-known maxim, that "Ridicule is the test of truth:" and then, whenever the Reviewers hold up a doctrine as ridiculous, they have nothing to do, but to join the laugh, and conclude it to be a "vulgar error, or a popular superstition."

practice of religion that Mr. Belsham was qualified to see and pronounce Calvinism to be *gloomy* and *erroneous*, an *unamiable* and *melancholy* system? Charity forbids us to think he was thus qualified; and if so, by his own rule he is no very competent judge; except he is pleased to adopt the alternative, that he is only the humble follower of more *sagacious*, but *irreligious* guides."*

We read of different kinds of preparatives in the scriptures; but I do not recollect that they contain any thing like the above. Zeal and attention, a disposition to *search* and *pray*, according to Solomon, is a preparative for the discovery of truth.† The piety of Cornelius, which he exercised according to the opportunities he possessed of obtaining light, was a preparative for his reception of the gospel as soon as he heard it.‡ And this accords with our Lord's declaration, *He that will do his will shall know of his doctrine.* On the other hand, the cold indifference of some in the apostolic age, *who received not the love of the truth*, but, as it should seem, held it with a loose hand, even while they professed it, was equally a preparative for apostacy.§ We also read of some, in Isaiah's time, "who leaned very much to a life of dissipation:" they erred *through wine. All tables are full of vomit and filthiness*, (saith the prophet, describing one of their assemblies,) *so that there is no place.* He adds, *Whom shall he teach knowledge, and whom shall he make to understand doctrine?* And what is the answer? Were the men who "leaned to a life of dissipation," who loved to suck at the breasts of sensual indulgence, the proper subjects? No *those that were weaned from the breasts, and drawn from the milk.*‖ But now, it seems, the case is altered, and, in order to find out the truth, the most likely way is, to be divested of *all religion!*

It is true, these things are spoken of what are called "speculative Unitarians," whom Dr. Priestley calls "men of the world, and distinguishes them from "serious Christians." He endeavours also to guard his cause by observing, that the bulk of profes-

* Discourse on the Influence of Religious Practice upon our Inquiries after Truth, in Answer to Mr. Belsham's Sermon, p. 6.

† Prov. ii. 1—9. ‡ Acts x. § 2 Thes. ii. 10. ‖ Isa. xxviii. 7, 9, 13.

sing Christians, or of those who should have ranked as Christians, in every age, have been of this description. It must be acknowledged, that there have been lukewarm, dissipated, and merely nominal Christians, in all ages of the church, and in every denomination: I suspect, however, that Dr. Priestley, in order to reduce the state of the church in general to that of the Unitarians, has rather magnified this matter. But, be that as it may, there are *two* circumstances which render it improper for him to reason from this case to the other:—First; whatever bad characters have ranked with other denominations, (at least with ours,) as to their religious creed, we do not own, or consider them as "converts;" much less do we glory in the spread of our principles, when men of that character profess to embrace them, as this writer does.* If we speak of converts to our principles, we disown such people, and leave them out of the account, as persons whose walk and conversation, whatever be their speculative opinions, discover them to be *enemies to the cross of Christ*. But, were the Socinians to do so, it is more than probable that the number of converts of whom they boast would be greatly diminished. Secondly; whenever irreligious characters profess to imbibe our principles, we do not consider their state of mind as friendly to them. That which we account truth, is a system of holiness; a system, therefore, which men of "no religion" will never cordially embrace. Persons may, indeed, embrace a notion about the certainty of the divine decrees, and of the necessity of things being as they are to be, whether the proper means be used, or not; and they may live in the neglect of all means, and of all practical religion, and may reckon themselves, and be reckoned by some others, among the Calvinists. To such a creed as this, it is allowed, the want of all religion is the best preparative: but then it must be observed, that the creed itself is as false as the practice attending it is impure, and as opposite to Calvinism as it is to scripture and common sense. Our opponents, on the contrary, ascribe many of their conversions to the absence of religion, as their proper cause, granting that "many of those who judge so truly concerning par-

* Discourses on Various Subjects, pp. 91—93, 94.

ticular tenets in religion, have attained to that cool, unbiassed temper of mind, *in consequence* of becoming more indifferent to religion in general, and to all the modes and doctrines of it." Could this acknowledgment be considered as the mistake of an unguarded moment, it might be overlooked: but it is a *fact;* a fact which, as Dr. Priestley himself expresses it, "cannot be denied;"* a fact therefore, which must needs prove a millstone about the neck of his system. That doctrine, be it what it may, to which an indifference to religion in general is friendly, cannot be the gospel, or any thing pertaining to it, but something very near akin to Infidelity.

If it be objected, that the immoral character of persons, previously to their embracing a set of principles, ought not to be alleged against the moral tendency of those principles, because, if it were, Christianity itself would be dishonoured by the previous character of many of the primitive Christians;—it is replied, there are two circumstances necessary to render this objection of any force: First, the previous character of the convert, however wicked it may have been, must have *no influence* on his conversion, Secondly; this conversion must have such an influence on him, that, whatever may have been his past character, his future life shall be devoted to God. Both these circumstances existed in the case of the primitive Christians; and if the same could be said of the converts to Socinianism, it is acknowledged, that all objections from this quarter ought to give way. But this is not the case. Socinian converts are not only allowed, many of them, to be men of *no religion;* but the want of religion, as we have seen already, is allowed to have influenced their conversion. Nor is this all: it is allowed, that their conversion to these principles has no such influence upon them as to make any material change in their character for the better. This is a fact tacitly admitted by Mr. Belsham, in that he goes about to account for it, by alleging what was their character previously to their conversion. It is true, he talks of this being the case "only for a time," and, at length, these converts are to "have their eyes opened; are to feel the benign influence of their principles, and demonstrate the

* Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 95.

excellency of their faith by the superior dignity and worth of their character." But these, it seems, like "the annihilation of death" and the conversion of Jews and Mahometans by the Socinian doctrine, are things *yet to come*.*

* Since the publication of the first edition of these Letters, a report has been circulated, that Dr. Priestley has been *misrepresented* by the quotation in page 55, which also was referred to at the commencement of the Preface. Dr. P. it has been said, in the place from whence the passage is taken, *was not commending a total indifference to religion, but the contrary; and his meaning was not that such a disregard to all religion is a better qualification for discerning truth than a serious temper of mind, but that it is preferable to that bigoted attachment to a system, which some people discover.*

That Dr. P.'s leading design was to commend a total indifference to religion, was never suggested. I suppose this, on the contrary, was to commend good discipline among the Unitarians, for the purpose of promoting religious zeal His words are, (accounting for the want of zeal among them,) "It cannot be denied, that many of those who judge so truly concerning particular tenets in religion, have attained to that cool, unbiassed temper of mind, in consequence of becoming more indifferent to religion in general, and to all the modes and doctrines of it. Though, therefore, they are in a more favourable situation for distinguishing between truth and falsehood, they are not likely to acquire a *zeal* for what they conceive to be the truth."

The *leading* design of Dr. P. in this passage, it is allowed, was to recommend good discipline, as friendly to zeal; and as a previous indifference to religion in general was unfavourable to that temper of mind which he wished to inspire, in this view he is to be understood as blaming it. Yet, in an *incidental* manner he as plainly acknowledges it to have been favourable for distinguishing between truth and falsehood; and, in this view, he must be understood as *commending* it. That he does commend it, though in an incidental way, is manifest from his attributing their judging so truly concerning particular tenets in religion to it; and that, not merely as an occasion, but as an adequate cause, producing a good effect: rendering the mind more cool and unbiassed than it was before. To suppose that Dr. P. does not mean to recommend indifference to religion in general, as friendly to *truth*, (though unfriendly to *zeal*,) is supposing him not to mean what he says.

As to the question, Whether Dr. P. means to compare an indifference to religion in general with a serious temper of mind, or with a spirit of bigotry? It cannot be the latter, unless he considers the characters of whom he speaks, as having been formerly bigoted in their attachment to modes and forms: for he is not comparing them with *other people*, but with *themselves at a former period* So long as they regarded religion in general, according to his account, they

But it will be pleaded, Though many who go over to Socinianism are men of no religion, and, continue to "lean to a life of

were in a less favourable situation for distinguishing between truth and falsehood, than when they came to disregard it. Dr. P.'s own account of these characters seems to agree with mere men of the world, rather than with religious bigots. They were persons, he says, who troubled themselves very little about religion, but who had been led to turn their attention to the dispute concerning the person of Christ, and, by their natural good sense had decided upon it. To this effect he writes in pages 96, 97, of his Discourses on Various Subjects. Now, this is far from answering to the character of religious bigots, or of those who at any time have sustained that character.

But, waving this, let us suppose, that the regard which those characters bore towards religion in general, *was* the regard of bigots. In this case, they were a kind of *Pharisees*, attached to modes and forms which blinded their minds from discovering the truth. Afterwards, they approached nearer to the *Sadducees*, became more indifferent to religion in general, and to all the modes and doctrines of it. The amount of Dr. P.'s position would then be, That the spirit of a Sadducee is preferable, with respect to discerning truth, to that of a Pharisee, possessing more of a cool, unbiassed temper of mind. The reply that I should make to this is, That neither Pharisees nor Sadducees possess that temper of mind of which Dr. P. speaks, but are both *a generation of vipers*, different in some respects, but equally malignant towards the true gospel of Christ; and that the humble, the candid, the serious, and the upright inquirers after truth are the only persons likely to find it. And this is the substance of what I advanced in the first page of the Preface, which has been charged as a *misrepresentation*. I never suggested that Dr. P. was comparing the characters in question with the serious or the candid; but rather, that *et the comparison respect whom it might*, his attributing an unbiassed temper of mind to men, in consequence of their becoming indifferent to religion in general, was erroneous; for that he who is not a friend to religion in any mode, is an enemy to it in all modes, and ought not to be complimented as being in a favourable situation for distinguishing between truth and falsehood.

A writer in the Monthly Review has laboured to bring Mr Belsham off in the same manner; but, instead of affording him any relief, he has betrayed the cause he has espoused, and made Mr. B. reason in a manner unworthy of his abilities. "We apprehend," says this writer, "that Mr. B. does not mean to assert, nor even to intimate, that indifference to religious practice prepared the mind for the admission of *that religious truth which prompts virtuous conduct*." Mr. B. however, *does* intimate, and even assert, "that the men who are the most indifferent to the practice of religion, will ever be he first not only to see the absurdity of a popular superstition, but to *embrace a*

dissipation," yet that is not the case *with all*: there are some who are exemplary in their lives, men of eminent piety and virtue, and

rational system of faith." Does the Reviewer mean, then, to acknowledge, that the rational system *does not include that kind of truth which prompts virtuous conduct?* There is no truth in his expressions, but upon this supposition.

But this writer not only informs us what Mr. B. did *not* mean, but what he *did* mean. (One would think the Reviewer of Dr. Williams must have been very intimate with Mr. B.) Mr. Belsham meant, it seems, "that the absurdities of a popular superstition are *more* apt to strike the minds of those who are *even* indifferent to religion, *than* of those who are bigoted in their attachment to particular creeds and rites; and therefore, that the former will be more inclined to allow reason to mould their faith, than the latter."—*Review of Dr. Williams' Answer to Mr. Belsham*, for Jan. 1792, p. 117.

To be sure, if a Reviewer may be allowed to add a few such words as *more*, and *than*, and *even*, to Mr. B.'s language, he may smooth its rough edges, and render it less exceptionable; but is it true that this was Mr. B.'s meaning, or that such a meaning would ever have been invented, but to serve a turn?

If there be any way of coming at an author's meaning, it is by his *words*, and by *the scope of his reasoning;* but neither the one nor the other will warrant this construction. Mr. B.'s *words* are these: "The men who are the most indifferent to the practice of religion, will ever be the *first* to embrace a rational system of faith." If he intended merely to assert, that immoral characters will embrace the truth before bigots, his words are abundantly too strong for his meaning: for, though the latter were allowed to be the last in embracing truth, it will not follow, that the former will be the *first*. If the rational system were on the side of truth, surely it might be expected, that the serious and the upright would be the *first* to embrace it. But this is not pretended. *Serious Christians*, by the acknowledgment of Mrs. Barbauld, are the *last* that come fully into it.

The *scope of Mr. Belsham's* reasoning is equally unfavourable to such a construction as his words are. There is nothing, in the objection which he encounters, that admits of such an answer. It was not alleged. *That there was a greater proportion of immoral characters, than of bigots, among the Unitarians;* had this been the charge, the answer put into Mr. B.'s lips, might have been in point. But the charge, as he himself expresses it, was simply this—"Rational Christians are often represented as indifferent to practical religion." To suppose that Mr. B. would account for this by alleging, that immoral characters are more likely to embrace the truth than bigots, (unless he denominate all bigots who are not Unitarians,) is supposing him to have left the objection unanswered. How is it, that there should be so great a proportion of immoral characters, rather than of *humble, serious, and godly men*, or of what Mr. Bel-

who are distinguished by Dr. Priestley by the name of "serious Christians."* To this it is replied—

First, Whatever piety or virtue there may be among Socinian converts, it may be doubted, whether piety or virtue led them to embrace that scheme, or were much in exercise in their researches after it. It has been observed, by some who have been most conversant with them, that, as they have discovered a predilection for those views of things, it has been very common for them to discover at the same time a light-minded temper, speaking of sacred things, and disputing about them, with the most unbecoming levity, and indecent freedom: avoiding all conversation on experimental and devotional subjects, and directing their whole discourse to matters of mere speculation. Indeed, piety and virtue are, in effect, acknowledged to be unfavourable to the embracing of the Socinian scheme: for, if "an indifference to religion in general be favourable to the distinguishing between truth and falsehood;" and if "those men who are the most indifferent to the practice of religion will ever be the *first* to embrace the rational system," it must follow, by the rule of contraries, that piety, virtue, and zeal for religion, are things unfavorable to that system, and that pious and virtuous persons will ever be the *last* to embrace it: nay, some may think it very doubtful whether they ever embrace it at all. *Serious Christians*, according to the account of Mrs. Barbauld, are the most difficult sort of people that Socinian writers and preachers have to deal with; for though they are sometimes brought to renounce the Calvinistic doctrines in theory, yet there is a sort of leaning towards them in their hearts, which their teachers know not how to eradicate. "These doc-

sham calls "practical believers?" This was the spirit of the objection: and if the above construction of Mr. B.'s words be admitted, it remains unanswered.

Let Dr. Priestley, or Mr. Belsham, or any of their advocates, who have charged the above quotations with *misrepresentation*, come forward, and, if they be able, make good the charge. Till this is done, I shall consider them as fair and just, and as including concessions which, though possibly made in an unguarded moment, contain a *truth* which must prove a millstone about the neck of the Socinian system.

* Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 98.

trines," she says, " it is true, among thinking people are losing ground ; but there is still apparent, in that class called *serious Christians*, a tenderness in exposing them ; a sort of leaning towards them, as in walking over a precipice one should lean to the safest side ; an idea that they are, if not true, at least good to be beleived, and that salutary error is better than a dangerous truth."*

Secondly, Whatever virtue there may be among Socinian converts, it may be questioned whether the distinguished principles of Socinianism have any tendency towards promoting it. The principles which they hold in common with us ; namely, the resurrection of the dead, and a future life, and not those in which they are distinguished from us, are confessedly the springs of their virtue. As to the simple humanity of Christ; which is one of the distinguishing principles of Socinianism, Dr. Priestly acknowledges, that " the connexion between this simple truth and a regular Christian life is very slight."† " That," says the same author, " which is most favorable to virtue in Christianity is the expectation of a future state of retribution, grounded on a firm belief of the historical facts recorded in the scriptures ; especially, the miracles, the death, and resurrection of Christ. The man who believes these things only, and who, together with this, acknowledges an universal providence, ordering all events ; who is persuaded that our very hearts are constantly open to divine inspection, so that no iniquity or purpose of it, can escape his observation ; will not be a bad man, or a dangerous member of society."‡ Now, these are things in which we are all agreed : whatever virtue, therefore is ascribed to them, it is not, strictly speaking, the result of Socinian principles. If, in addition to this, we were to impute a considerable degree of the virtue of Socinian converts to " the principles in which they were educated, and the influence to which they were exposed in the former part of their lives," we should only say of them what Dr. Priestley says of the virtuous lives of

* Remarks on Wakefield's Inquiry on Social Worship.

† Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 67.

‡ Letter V. to Mr. Burn.

some Atheists; and perhaps, we should have as good grounds for such an imputation in the one case, as he had in the other. *

Among the various Socinian converts, have we ever been used to hear of any remarkable change of life or behaviour, which a conversion to their peculiar principles effected? I hope there are few Calvinistic congregations in the Kingdom, but what could point out examples of persons among them, who at the time of their coming over to their doctrinal principles, came over also from the course of this world, and have ever since lived in newness of life. Can this be said of the generality of Socinian congregations? Those who have had the greatest opportunity of observing them, say the contrary. Yea, they add, that the conversion of sinners to a life of holiness does not appear to be their aim; that their concern seems to be, to pursuade those, who in their account, have *too much* religion, that less will suffice, rather than to address themselves to the irreligious, to convince them of their defect. A great part of Dr. Priestley's Sermon on the death of Mr. Robinson is of this tendency. Instead of concurring with the mind of God, as expressed in his word, *O that my people were wise, that they would consider their latter end!* the preacher goes about so dissuade his hearers from thinking too much upon that unwelcome subject.

You will judge, from these things, brethren, whether there be any cause for boasting on the part of the Socinians, in the number of "converts which they tell us are continually making to their principles;"† or for discouragement on the side of the Calvinists, as if what they account the cause of God and truth were going fast to decline. I am, &c.

* Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever *Part* I. *Preface*, p. vi.

† Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 93.

LETTER V.

ON THE STANDARD OF MORALITY.

Christian Brethren,

You have observed, that Dr. Priestley charges the Calvinistic system with being unfriendly to morality, "as giving wrong impressions concerning the character and moral government of God, and as relaxing the obligations of virtue." That you may judge of the propriety of this heavy charge, and whether our system, or his own, tends most to "relax the obligation of virtue," it seems proper to inquire, *which of them affords the most licentious notions of virtue itself.* To suppose that the scheme which pleads for relaxation, both in the precept and in the penalty of the great rule of divine government, should, after all, relax the least, is highly paradoxical. The system, be it which it may, that teaches us to lower the standard of obedience, or to make light of the nature of disobedience, must surely be the system which relaxes the obligations of virtue, and, consequently, is of an immoral tendency.

The eternal standard of right and wrong is the moral law, summed up in *love to God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to our neighbour as ovrselves.* This law is *holy, just, and good*: holy, as requiring perfect conformity to God; just, as being founded in the strictest equity; and good, as being equally adapted to promote the happiness of the creature as the glory of the Creator. Nor have we any notion of the precept of the law being abated, or a jot or title of it being given up, in order to suit the inclination of depraved creatures. We do not conceive the law to be more strict than it ought to be, even considering our present circumstances; because we consider the evil propensity of the heart, which alone renders us incapable of perfect obedience, as no excuse. Neither do we plead for the relaxation of the penalty of the law upon the footing of equity; but insist, that, though

God, through the mediation of his Son, *doth not mark iniquity in those that wait on him*, yet he *might* do so consistently with justice; and that his not doing so is of mere grace. I hope these sentiments do not tend to "relax the obligations of virtue." Let us inquire whether the same may be said of the scheme of our opponents.

It may be thought, that, in these matters, in some of them at least, we are agreed. And, indeed, I suppose few will care to deny, in express terms, that the moral law, consisting of a requisition to love God with all the heart, and our neighbour as ourselves, is an eternal standard of right and wrong. But let it be considered, whether the Socinians, in their descriptions of virtue and vice, do not greatly overlook the former branch of it, and almost confine themselves to those duties which belong to the latter. It has been long observed of writers of that stamp, that they exalt what are called the *social virtues*, or those virtues which respect society, to the neglect, and often at the expense of others which more immediately respect the God that made us. It is a very common thing for Socinians to make light of religious principle, and to represent it as of little importance to our future well-being. Under the specious name of *liberality of sentiment*, they dispense with that part of the will of God which requires every thought to be in subjection to the obedience of Christ; and, under the disguise of *candour and charity*, excuse those who fall under the divine censure. The Scripture speaks of those *who deny the Lord that bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction*—and *of those who receive not the love of the truth, being given up to believe a lie.* But the minds of Socinian writers appear to revolt at ideas of this kind: the tenor of their writings is to persuade mankind, that sentiments may be accepted, or rejected, without endangering their salvation. Infidels have sometimes complained of Christianity, as a kind of insult to their dignity, on account of its dealing in *threatenings:* but Dr. Priestley, in his *Letters to the Philosophers and Politicians of France*, has quite removed this stumbling block out of their way. He accounts for their infidelity in such a way as to acquit them of blame, and enforces Christianity upon them by the most inoffensive motives. Not one word is intimated as if there was any dan-

ger as to futurity, though they should continue Infidels, or even Atheists, till death. The only string upon which he harps, as I remember, is, that could they but embrace Christianity, they would be much happier than they are!

If I entertain degrading notions of the person of Christ, and if I err from the truth in so doing, my error, according to Mr. Lindsey, is *innocent*,* and no one ought to think the worse of me on that account. But if I happen to be of opinion, that he who rejects the deity and atonement of Christ is not a Christian, I give great offence. But wherefore? Suppose it an error, why should it not be as innocent as the former? and why ought I to be reproached as an illiberal, uncharitable bigot for this, while no one ought to think the worse of me for the other? Can this be any otherwise accounted for, than by supposing that those who reason in this manner, are more concerned for their own honour, than for that of Christ?

Dr. Priestley, it may be noted, makes much lighter of error when speaking on the supposition of its being found in himself, than when he supposes it to be found in his opponents. He charges Mr. Venn, and others, with "striving to render those who differ from them in some *speculative points* odious to their fellow christians;" and elsewhere suggests, that, "we shall not be judged at the last day according to our *opinions*, but our *works;* not according to what we have *thought of Christ*, but as we have *obeyed his commands:*"† as if it were no distinguishing property of a good work, that it originate in a good principle; and, as if the meanest opinion, and the most degrading thoughts of Jesus Christ, were consistent with obedience to him. But when he himself becomes the accuser, the case is altered, and instead of reckoning the supposed errors of the Trinitarians to be merely *speculative points*, and *harmless opinions*, they are said to be "idolatrous, and blasphemous."‡ but idolatry and blasphemy will not only be

* Apology, 4th edition, p. 48.

† Consideration on Differences of Opinion, § III. Defence of Unitarianism for 1786, p. 59 Ditto for 1787, p. 68.

‡ Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 96.

brought into account at the day of judgment, but be very offensive in the eyes of God.* For my part, I am not offended with Dr. Priestley, or any other Socinian, for calling the worship that I pay to Christ, idolatry and blasphemy; because, if he be only a man, what they say is just. If they can acquit themselves of sin in *thinking* meanly of Christ, they certainly can do the same in *speaking* meanly of him; and words ought to correspond with thoughts. I only think they should not trifle in such a manner as they do with error, when it is supposed to have place in themselves, any more than when they charge it upon their opponents.

If Dr. Priestley had formed his estimate of human virtue by that great standard which requires love to God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to our neighbour as ourselves; instead of representing men by nature as having "more virtue than vice,"† he must have acknowledged, with the scriptures, that *the whole world lieth in wickedness—that every thought and imagination of their heart is only evil continually*— and that *there is none* of them *that doeth good, no not one.*

If Mr. Belsham, in the midst of that "marvellous light" which he professes lately to have received, had only seen the *extent* and *goodness* of that law which requires us to love God with *all* our hearts, and our neighbour as ourselves, in the light in which revelation places it; he could not have trifled, in the manner he has, with the nature of sin, calling it "human frailty," and the subjects of it "the frail and erring children of men;" nor could he have represented God, in, "marking and punishing every instance of it, as acting the part of a merciless tyrant."‡ Mr. Belsham talks of "Unitarians being led to form just sentiments of the *reasonableness* of the divine law, and the *equity* of the divine government;" but of what divine law does he speak? Not of that, surely, which requires love to God with *all* the heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves; nor of that government which

* 1 *Cor.* vi. 9, 10.

† Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever, *Part* I. p. 80.

‡ Sermon, pp. 33—35.

threatens the curse of God on every one that continueth not in *all things* written in the book of the law to do them ; for this allows not of a *single transgression*, and punishes *every instance* of human folly, which Mr. Belsham considers as "merciless tyranny." He means to insinuate, I suppose, that for the law to take cognizance of the very thoughts and intents of the heart, at least of *every instance* that occurs, is *unreasonable;* and that to inflict punishment accordingly is *inequitable*. He conceives, therefore, of a law, it seems, that is more accommodated to the *propensities*, or, as he would call them, *frailties* of the erring children of men ; a law that may *not* cut off all hopes of a sinner's acceptance with God by the deeds of it, so as to render an *atoning* mediator absolutely necessary, and this he calls *reasonable;* and of a government that will *not* bring every secret thing into judgment, nor make men accountable for *every idle word*, and this he calls *equitable*. And this is the "marvellous light" of Socinianism ; this is the doctrine that is to promote a holy life ; this is the scheme of those who are continually branding the Calvinistic system with Antinomianism.

If the moral law require love to God with *all* the heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, and to our neighbour as ourselves ; it cannot allow the *least degree* of alienation of the heart from God, or of the *smallest instance* of malevolence to man. And, if it be what the scripture says it is, *holy*, *just*, and *good;* then, though it require *all* the heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, it cannot be too strict ; and if it be not too strict, it cannot be unworthy of God, nor can it be "merciless tyranny" to abide by it. On the contrary, it must be worthy of God to say of a just law, *Not a jot or tittle of it shall fail.*

Dr. M'Gill, in his *Practical Essay on the death of Jesus Christ*, maintains, that "the Supreme Lawgiver determined from the beginning to mitigate the rigour of the law, to make allowances for human error and imperfection, and to accept of repentance and sincere obedience, instead of sinless perfection." But, if this were the determination of the lawgiver, it was either considered as a matter of *right*, or of *undeserved favour*. If the former, why was not the law so framed as to correspond with the determination of the lawgiver ? How was it, especially, that a new edition of it

should be published from Mount Sinai, and that without any such allowances? Or, if this could be accounted for, how was it that Jesus Christ should declare, that *not a jot or tittle of it should fail*, and make it his business to condemn the conduct of the scribes and pharisees, who had lowered its demands, and softened its penalties, with a view to "make allowance for human error and imperfection?" It could answer no good end, one should think, to load the divine precepts with threatnings of cruelty. A law so loaded would not bear to be put in execution: and we have been taught by Dr. Priestley, in what he has written on the Test-Act, to consider "the continuance of a law which will not bear to be put in execution, as needless and oppressive, and as what ought to be abrogated."* If repentance and sincere obedience be all that ought to be required of men in their present state, then the law ought to be so framed, and allowance to be made by it for error and imperfection. But then it would follow, that where men *do* repent, and *are* sincere, there are no errors and imperfections to be allowed for. Errors and imperfections imply a law from which they are deviations; but if we be under no law, except one that allows for deviations, then we are as holy as we ought to be, and need no forgiveness.

If, on the other hand, it be allowed that the relaxation of the law of innocence is not what we have any *right* to expect, but that God has granted us this indulgence out of *pure grace;* I would then ask the reason, why these gentlemen are continually exclaiming against our principles as making the Almighty a tyrant, and his law unreasonble, and cruel? Is it tyrannical, unreasonable, or cruel, for God to withhold what we have no right to expect?†

* Familiar Letters, *Letter* VI.

† The Intelligent reader, who is acquainted with the different sentiments that are embraced in the religious world, will easily perceive the agreement between the Socinian and Armenian systems on this subject. By their exclamations on the *injustice* of God as represented by the Calvinistic system, they both render that a *debt*, which God in the whole tenor of his word declares to be of *grace*. Neither of them will admit the equity of the divine law, and that man is thereby righteously condemned to eternal punishment, antecedently to the grace of the gospel; or, if they admit it in words, they will be ever contradicting it by the tenor of their reasoning.

Dr. Priestley defines *justice*, as being "such a degree of severity, or pains and penalties so inflicted, as will produce the best effect with respect both to those who are exposed to them, and to others who are under the same government: or, in other words, that degree of evil which is calculated to produce the greatest degree of good: and, if the punishment exceed this measure; if, in any instance, it be an *unnecessary* or *useless* suffering, it is always censured as *cruelty* and is not even called justice, but real injustice." To this he adds "If, in any particular case, the strict execution of the law would do more harm than good, it is universally agreed, that the punishment ought to be remitted."* With an observation or two on the above passage, I shall close this letter.

First, That all punishments are designed for the good of the whole, and less (or corrective) punishments for the good of the offender, is admitted. Every instance of divine punishment will be not only proportioned to the laws of equity, but adapted to promote the good of the universe at large. God never inflicts punishment for the sake of punishing. He has no such pleasure in the death of a sinner as to put him to pain, whatever may be his desert, without some great and good end to be answered by it: but that, in the case of the finally-impenitent, this end should necessarily include the good of the offender, is as contrary to reason as it is to scripture, it does not appear, from any thing we know of governments, either human or divine, that the good of the offender is necessarily, and in all cases, the end of punishment. When a murderer is executed, it is necessary for the good of the community: but it would sound very strange to say, it was necessary for his own good; and that, unless *his* good were promoted by it, as well as that of the community, it must be an act of cruelty!

Secondly, that there are cases in human government, in which it is right and necessary to relax in the execution of the sentence of the law, is also admitted. But this arises from the imperfection of human laws. Laws are general rules for the conduct of a community, with suitable punishments annexed to the breach of them. But no general rules can be made by men, that will apply

* Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever, *Part* I. pp. 100, 101

to every particular case. If legislators were wise and good men, and could foresee every particular case that would arise in the different stages of society, they would so frame their laws as that they need not be relaxed when those cases should occur. But God is wise and good; and, previous to his giving us the law which requires us to love him with *all* our hearts, and our neighbour as ourselves, knew every change that could possibly arise, and every case that could occur. The question, therefore, is not, "If in any particular case the strict execution of the law would do more harm than good, whether it ought not to be remitted;" but, whether an omniscient, wise and good lawgiver, can be supposed to have made a law, the penalty of which, if put in execution, would do more harm than good? Would a being of such a character make a law, the penalty of which, according to strict equity, requires to be remitted; a law by which he could not in justice abide; and that not only in a few singular cases, but in the case of every individual, in every age, to whom it is given?

It is possible these considerations may suffice to show that the divine law is *not* relaxed; but be that as it may, the question at issue is, what is the *moral tendency* of supposing that it is? To relax a bad law would indeed have a good effect, and to abrogate it would have a better; but not so respecting a good one. If the divine law be what the scripture says it is, *holy, just* and *good;* to relax it in the precept, or even to mitigate the penalty, without some expedient to secure its honors, must be subversive of good order; and the scheme which pleads for such relaxation, must be unfavorable to holiness, justice, and goodness.

I am, &c.

LETTER VI.

THE SYSTEMS COMPARED, AS TO THEIR TENDENCY TO PROMOTE MORALITY IN GENERAL.

Christian Brethren,

What has been advanced in the last Letter on the standard of morality, may serve to fix the meaning of the term in this. The term *morality*, you know, is sometimes used to express those duties which subsist between men and men, and in this acceptation stands distinguished from *religion;* but I mean to include under it, the whole of what is contained in the moral law.

Nothing is more common than for the adversaries of the Calvinistic system to charge it with immorality; nay, as if this were self-evident, they seem to think themselves excused from advancing any thing like sober evidence to support the charge. Virulence, rant, and extravagance, are the weapons with which we are not unfrequently combatted in this warfare. "I challenge the whole body and being of moral evil itself," says a writer of the present day,* "to invent, or inspire, or whisper, any thing blacker, or more wicked: yea, if sin itself had all the wit, the tongues, and pens of all men and angels, to all eternity, I defy the whole to say any thing of God worse than this. O sin, thou hast spent and emptied thyself in the doctrine of John Calvin! And here I rejoice that I have heard the utmost that malevolence itself shall ever be able to say against infinite benignity! I was myself brought up and tutored in it, and being delivered and brought to see the evil and danger, am bound by my obligations to God, angels, and men, to warn my fellow-sinners; I therefore, here, before God, and the whole universe, recal and condemn every word I have spoken in favor of it. I thus renounce the doctrine as the rancor of devils;

* Llewellyn's Tracts, p. 292.

a doctrine, the preaching of which is babbling and mocking, its prayers blasphemy, and whose praises are the horrible yellings of sin and hell. And this I do, because I know and believe that God is love; and therefore his decrees, works and ways, are also love, and cannot be otherwise." It were ill-spent time to atttempt an answer to such unfounded calumny as this, which certainly partakes much more of the ravings of insanity, than of the words of truth and soberness: yet this, according to the *Monthly Review*, is "The true coloring of the doctrine of Calvinism."* Had any thing like this been written by a Calvinist against Socianism, the Reviewers would have been the first to have exclaimed against Calvinistic illiberality.

This gentleman professes to have been a Calvinist, and so does Dr. Priestley. The Calvinism of the latter, however, seems to have left an impression upon his mind very different from the above. "Whether it be owing to my Calvinistic education," says he, "or my considering the principles of Calvinism as generally favorable to that leading virtue, *devotion*, or to their being something akin to the doctrine of Necessity, I cannot but acknowledge, that, notwithstanding what I have occasionally written against that system, and which I am far from wishing to retract, I feel myself disposed to look upon Calvinists with a kind of *respect*, and could never join in the contempt and insult with which I have often heard them treated in conversation."†

But Dr. Priestley, I may be told, whatever good opinion he may have of the piety and virtue of Calvinists, he has a very ill opinion of Calvinism: and this, in a certain degree, is true. Dr. Priestley, however, would not say, that "The preaching of that system was babbling and mocking, its prayers blasphemy, or its praises the horrible yellings of sin and hell:" on the contrary, he acknowledges "its principles to be generally favorable to that leading virtue, *devotion*."

I confess, Dr. Priestley has advanced some heavy accusations on the immoral tendency of Calvinism; accusations which seem

* Review for July, 1792, p. 266.

† The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity illustrated. p. 163.

scarcely consistent with the candid concessions just now quoted; and these I shall now proceed to examine. "I do not see," says he "what motive a Calvinist can have to give any attention to his moral conduct. So long as he is unregenerate, all his thoughts, words, and actions, are necessarily sinful, and in the act of *regeneration* he is altogether passive. On this account, the most consistent Calvinists never address any exhortation to sinners; considering them as *dead in trespasses and sins*, and, therefore, that there would be as much sense and propriety in speaking to the dead, as to them. On the other hand, if a man be in the happy number of the *elect*, he is sure that God will, some time or other, and at the most proper time, (for which the last moment of his life is not too late,) work upon him his miraculous work of *saving and sanctifying grace*. Though he should be ever so wicked immediately before this divine and *effectual calling*, it makes nothing against him. Nay, some think that this, being a more signal display of the wonders of divine grace, it is rather the more probable that God will take this opportunity to display it. If any system of speculative principles can operate as an axe at the root of all virtue and goodness, it is this."* On this unfavourable account of Calvinism I will offer the following observations.

First, If Calvinism be an axe at the root of virtue and goodness, it is only so with respect to those of the "unregenerate;" which certainly does not include all the virtue and goodness in the world. As to others, Dr. Priestley acknowledges, as we have seen already, that our principles are "generally favourable to *devotion:*" and devotion, if it be what he denominates it, "a *leading* virtue," will doubtless be *followed* with other virtues correspondent with it. He acknowledges also, "There are many (among the Calvinists) whose hearts and lives are, in all respects, truly Christian, and whose Christian tempers are really promoted *by their own views of their system.*"† How is it, then, that Dr. Priestley "cannot see what motive a Calvinist can have to give any attention to his moral conduct;" and why does he represent Calvinism as "an axe at the root of *all* virtue and goodness?" By all virtue and goodness

* Doctrine of Necessity, p. 154. † Ibid. pp. 163, 164.

he can only mean the virtue and goodness of wicked men. Indeed, this appears plainly to have been his meaning: for, after acknowledging, that Calvinism has something in it favourable to "an habitual and animated devotion," he adds, "But, where a disposition to vice has pre-occupied the mind, I am very well satisfied, and but too many facts might be alleged in proof of it, that the doctrines of Calvinism have been actually fatal to the *remains of virtue*, and have driven men into the most desperate and abandoned course of wickedness; whereas the doctrine of necessity, properly understood, cannot possibly have any such effect, but the contrary."* Now, suppose all these were true, it can never justify Dr. Priestley in the use of such unlimited terms as those before mentioned. Nor is it any disgrace to the Calvinistic system, that men whose minds are pre-occupied with vice should misunderstand and abuse it. The purest liquor, if put into a musty cask, will become unpalatable. It is no more than is said of some who professed to embrace Christianity in the times of the apostles, that they *turned the grace of God into lasciviousness.* Is it any wonder that the wicked will do wickedly; or that they will extract poison from that which, rightly understood, is the food of the righteous? It is enough, if our sentiments, like *God's words, do good to the upright. Wisdom* does not expect to be *justified*, but *of her children.* The scriptures themselves make no pretence of having been useful to those who have still lived in sin; but allow the gospel to be *a savour of death unto death in them that perish.* The doctrine of necessity is as liable to produce this effect, as any of the doctrines of Calvinism. It is true, as Dr. Priestley observes, "it cannot do so, if it be properly understood:" but this is allowing that it may do so, if it be misunderstood; and we have as good reason for ascribing the want of a proper understanding of the subject to those who abuse predestination, and other Calvinistic doctrines, as he has for ascribing it to those who abuse the doctrine of necessity. Dr. Priestley speaks of *the remains of virtue*, where a disposition to vice has pre-occupied the mind; and of the Calvinistic system being as an axe at the root of these remains: but some people

* Doctrine of Necessity, p. 162.

will question, whether virtue of this description have any root belonging to it, so as to require an axe to cut it up; and whether it be not owing to this circumstance that such characters, like the stony-ground hearers, in time of temptation fall away.

Secondly, The Calvinistic system is misrepresented by Dr. Priestley, even as to its influence on the *unregenerate*. In the passage before quoted, he represents those persons, "who are of the happy number of the elect, as being *sure* that God will, some time or other, work upon them his work of sanctifying grace." But how are they to come to this assurance? Not by any thing contained in the Calvinistic system. All the writers in that scheme have constantly insisted, that no man has any warrant to conclude himself of the happy number of the elect, till the work of sanctifying grace is actually wrought. With what colour of truth or ingenuousness, then, could Dr. Priestley represent our system as affording a ground of assurance, previous to that event? This is not a matter of small account in the present controversy; it is the point on which the immoral tendency of the doctrine wholly depends.

As to the *certainty* of any man's being sanctified and saved at some future time, this can have no ill influence upon him, while it exists merely in the divine mind. If it have any such influence, it must be owing to his *knowledge* of it at a time when, his heart being set on evil, he would be disposed to abuse it: but this, as we have seen, upon the Calvinistic system, is utterly impossible; because nothing short of a sanctified temper of mind affords any just grounds to draw the favourable conclusion. Dr. Priestley has also represented it as a part of the Calvinistic system, or, however, "as the opinion of some," that, the more wicked a man is, previous to God's work of sanctifying grace upon him, the more probable it is that he will, some time, be sanctified and saved. But, though it be allowed, that God frequently takes occasion from the degree of human wickedness to magnify his grace in delivering from it; yet it is no part of the Calvinistic system, that the former affords any grounds of probability to expect the latter: and whoever they be that Dr. Priestley alludes to, as entertaining such an opinion, I am inclined to think they are not among the respectable

writers of the party, and probably not among those who have written at all.

Thirdly, Let it be considered, Whether Dr. Priestley's own views of Philosophical Necessity do not amount to the same thing as those which he alleges to the discredit of Calvinism; or, if he will insist upon the contrary, whether he must not contradict himself, and maintain a system, which, by his own confession, is less friendly to piety and humility than that which he opposes. A state of *unregeneracy* is considered by Calvinists as the same thing which Dr. Priestley describes as "the state of a person who sins with *a full consent of will*, and who, *disposed as he is*, is under an impossibility of acting otherwise; but who," as he justly maintains, "is nevertheless accountable, even though that consent be produced by the efficacy and unconquerable influence of motives. It is only," continues he, "where the necessity of sinning arises from *some other cause than a man's own disposition of mind*, that we ever say, there is an impropriety in punishing a man for his conduct. If the impossibility of acting well has arisen from *a bad disposition*, or *habit*, its having been impossible, *with that disposition* or *habit*, to act virtuously, is never any reason for our forbearing punishment; because we know that punishment is proper to correct that disposition and that habit."* Now, if it be consistent to punish a man for necessary evil, as Dr. Priestley abundantly maintains, why should it be inconsistent to exhort, persuade, reason, or expostulate with him; and why does he call those Calvinists "the most consistent," who avoid such addresses to their auditors? If "the thoughts, words, and actions of unregenerate men, being necessarily sinful," be a just reason why they should not have exhortations addressed to them, the whole doctrine of Necessity must be inconsistent with the use of means, than which nothing can be more contrary to truth, and to Dr. Priestley's own views of things.

As to our being *passive* in regeneration, if Dr. Priestley would only admit, that any one character could be found that is so depraved as to be destitute of all true virtue, the same thing would fol-

* Doctrine of Necessity, pp. 63—65.

low from his own Necessarian principles. According to those principles, every man who is under the dominion of a vicious habit of mind, will continue to choose vice, till such time as that habit be changed, and that, by some influence without himself. "If," says he, "I make any particular choice to-day, I should have done the same yesterday, and should do the same to-morrow, provided there be no change in the state of my mind respecting the object of the choice."* Now, can any person in such a state of mind be supposed to be active in the changing of it; for such activity must imply an inclination to have it changed; which is a contradiction, as it supposes him at the same time under the dominion of evil, and inclined to goodness?

But, possibly, Dr. Priestley will not admit that any one character can be found, who is utterly destitute of true virtue. Be it so: he must admit that, in some characters, vice has an *habitual ascendancy:* but the habitual ascendancy of vice as certainly determines the choice, as even a total depravity. A decided majority in parliament carry every measure with as much certainty as if there were no minority. Wherever vice is predominant, (and in no other case is regeneration needed,) the party must necessarily be *passive* in the first change of his mind in favor of virtue.

But there are seasons in the life of the most vicious men, in which their evil propensities are at a lower ebb than usual; in which conscience is alive, and thoughts of a serious nature arrest their attention. At these favorable moments, it may be thought that virtue has the advantage of its opposite, and that this is the time for a person to become active in effecting a change upon his own mind. Without inquiring whether there be any real virtue in all this, it is sufficient to observe, that, if we allow the whole of what is pleaded for, the objection destroys itself. For it supposes that, in order to a voluntary activity in favor of virtue, the mind must first be virtuously disposed, and that by something in which it was *passive;* which is giving up the point in dispute.

Dr. Priestly often represents "a change of disposition and character as being effected only by a change of conduct, and that of

* Doctrine of Necessity, p. 7.

long continuance."* But, whatever influence a course of virtuous actions may have upon the disposions, and however it may tend to establish us in the habit of doing good, *all* goodness of disposition cannot arise from this quarter. There must have been a disposisition to good, and one too that was sufficiently strong to outweigh its opposite, ere a course of virtuous actions could be commenced; for virtuous action is nothing but the effect, or expression, of virtuous disposition. To say that this previous disposition was also produced by other previous actions, is only carrying the matter a little farther out of sight; for, unless it can be proved, that virtuous action may exist prior to, and without all virtuous disposition, let the one be carried back as far as it may, it must still have been preceded by the other, and, in obtaining the preceding disposition, the soul must necessarily have been *passive*.†

Dr. Priestley labours hard to overthrow the doctrine of *immediate divine agency*, and contends that all divine influence upon the human mind is through the medium of second causes, or according to the established laws of nature. "If moral impressions were made upon men's minds by immediate divine agency, to what end," he asks, "has been the whole apparatus of *revealed religion?*"‡ This, in effect, is saying, that if there be laws for such an operation upon the human mind, every kind of influence upon it must be through the medium of those laws; and that, if it be otherwise, there is no need of the use of means. But might he not as well allege, that, if there be laws by which the planets move, every kind of influence upon them must have been through the medium

* Doctrine of Necessity, p. 156.

† Since the publication of the second edition of these Letters, it has been suggested by a friend, that there is no necessity for confining these observations to the case of a man totally depraved, or of one under the habitual ascendancy of vice: for that, according to Dr. Priestley's Necessarian principles, all volitions are the effects of motives: therefore every man, in every volition, as he is the subject of the influence of motive, operating as a cause, *is passive;* equally so, as he is supposed to be, according to the Calvinistic system, in regeneration.

‡ Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 221.

of those laws; and deny, that the Divine Being immediately, and prior to the operation of the laws of nature, put them all in motion? Might he not as well ask, If an immediate influence could be exercised in setting the material system in motion, of what use are all the laws of nature, by which it is kept in motion? Whatever laws attend the movements of the material system, the first creation of it is allowed to have been by an immediate exertion of divine power. God said, *Let there be light, and there was light;* and why should not the second creation be the same? I say *the second creation;* for the change upon the sinner's heart is represented as nothing less in the divine word; and the very manner of its being effected, is expressed in language which evidently alludes to the first creation—*God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ.* Not only scripture, but reason itself, teaches the necessity for such an immediate divine interposition in the changing of a sinner's heart. If a piece of machinery (suppose the whole material system,) were once in a state of disorder, the mere exercise of those laws by which it was ordained to move, would never bring it into order again; but, on the contrary, would drive it on farther and farther to everalsting confusion.

As to *election*, Dr. Priestley cannot consistently maintain his scheme of Necessity without admitting it. If, as he abundantly maintains, God is the author of every good disposition in the human heart;* and if, as he also in the same section maintains, God, in all that he does, pursues one plan, or system, previously concerted; it must follow, that wherever good dispositions are produced, and men are finally saved, it is altogether in consequence of the appointment of God; which, as to the present argument, is the same thing as the Calvinistic doctrine of election.

So plain a consequence is this from Dr. Priestley's Necessarian principles, that he himself, when writing his Treatise on that subject, could not forbear to draw it. "Our Saviour," he says, "seems to have considered the rejection of the gospel by those

* Doctrine of Necessity, § XI.

who boasted of their wisdom,* and the reception of it by the more despised part of mankind, as being the consequence of the express appointment of God: *At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight.*" To the same purpose, in the next page but one, he observes, that God is considered as "the sovereign disposer, both of gospel privileges here, and future happiness hereafter, as appears in such passages as 2 Thess. ii. 13. *God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.*"†

If there be any difference between that election which is involved in Dr. Priestley's own scheme, and that of the Calvinists, it must consist, not in the original appointment, or in the certainty of the event, but in the intermediate causes or reasons which induced the Deity to fix things in the manner that he has done: and it is doubtful whether even this can be admitted. It is true, Dr. Priestley, by his exclamations against *unconditional election*,‡ would seem to maintain, that, where God hath appointed a sinner to obtain salvation, it is on account of his foreseen virtue: and he may plead, that such an election is favorable to virtue, as making it the ground, or procuring cause of eternal felicity; while an election that is altogether unconditional, must be directly the reverse. But let it be considered, in the first place, Whether such a view of election as this does not clash with the whole tenor of scripture, which teaches us that we are *saved and called with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to the divine purpose and grace given us in Christ Jesus before the world began—Not of works, lest any man should boast. At this time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace; otherwise work is no more*

* Query, Were not these the *rational religionists* of that age?

† Doctrine of Necessity, pp. 140—142.

‡ Considerations on Difference in Religious Opinions, § III.

work.* Secondly, Let it be considered, Whether such an election will consist with Dr. Priestley's own scheme of Necessity. This scheme supposes, that all virtue, as well as every thing else, is necessary. Now, whence arose the necessity of it? It was not self-originated, nor accidental: it must have been established by the Deity. And then it will follow, that, if God elect any man on account of his foreseen virtue, he must have elected him on account of that which he had determined to give him: but this, as to the origin of things, amounts to the same thing as unconditional election.

As to men's taking liberty to sin, from the consideration of their being among the number of the elect; that, as we have seen already, is what no man can do with safety or consistency; seeing he can have no evidence on that subject, but what must arise from a contrary spirit and conduct. But suppose it were otherwise, an objection of this sort would come with an ill grace from Dr. Priestley, who encourages all mankind not to fear, since God has made them all for unlimited ultimate happiness, and (whatever be their conduct in the present life) to ultimate unlimited happiness they will all doubtless come.†

Upon the whole, let those who are inured to close thinking, judge whether Dr. Priestley's own views of Philosophical Necessity do not include the leading principles of Calvinism? But, should he insist upon the contrary, then let it be considered, whether he must not contradict himself, and maintain a system which, by his own confession, is less friendly to piety and humility than that which he opposes. "The essential difference," he says, "between the two schemes is this: the Necessarian believes his own dispositions and actions are the necessary and sole means of his present and future happiness; so that, in the most proper sense of the words, it depends entirely on himself, whether he be virtuous or vicious, happy or miserable. The Calvinist

* See also those scriptures which represent election as the *cause* of faith and holiness; particularly Ephes. i. 3, 4. John. vi. 37. Rom. viii. 22. 30. Acts xiii. 48. 1 Pet. i. 1. Rom. ix. 15, 16. But, if it be the *cause* it cannot be the *effect* of them.

† Doctrine of Necessity, pp. 128, 129.

maintains, on the other hand, that so long as a man is unregenerate, all his thoughts, words, and actions are necessarily sinful, and in the act of regeneration he is altogether passive."* We have seen already, that on the scheme of Dr. Priestley, as well as that of the Calvinists, men, in the first turning of the bias of their hearts, must be passive. But allow it to be otherwise; allow what the Doctor elsewhere teaches, that "a change of disposition is the *effect*, and not the *cause* of a change of conduct;"† and that it depends entirely on ourselves, whether we will thus change our conduct, and, by these means, our dispositions, and so be happy for ever: all this, if others of his observations be just, instead of promoting piety and virtue, will have a contrary tendency. In the same performance, Dr. Priestley acknowledges, that "those who, from a principle of religion, ascribe more to God and less to man than other persons, are men of the greatest elevation of piety."‡ But, if so, it will follow, that the essential difference between the necessarianism of Socinians and that of Calvinists, (seeing it consists in this, that the one makes it depend entirely upon a man's self, whether he be virtuous or vicious, happy or miserable; and the other, upon God;) is in favour of the latter. Those who consider men as depending entirely upon God for virtue and happiness, ascribe more to God, and less to man than the other, and so, according to Dr. Priestley, are "men of the greatest elevation of piety." They on the other hand, who suppose men to be dependent entirely upon *themselves* for these things, must, consequently, have less of piety, and more of "heathen stoicism;" which, as the same writer, in the same treatise, observes, "allows men to pray for *external things*, but admonishes them, that, as for virtue, it is our own, and must arise from within ourselves, if we have it at all."§

But let us come to *facts*. If, as Dr. Priestley says, there be "something in our system, which, if carried to its just consequences, would lead us to the most abandoned wickedness;" it might be expected, one should think, that a loose, dissipated, and abandoned life would be a more general thing among the Calvinists than

* Doctrine of Necessity, p. 152—154. † Ibid p. 156. ‡ Ibid p. 107.
§ Ibid p. 67.

among their opponents. This seems to be a consequence of which he feels the force, and therefore discovers an inclination to make it good. In answer to the question, "Why those persons who hold these opinions are not abandoned to all wickedness, when they evidently lay them under so little restraint?" he answers, "This *is* often the case of those who pursue these principles to their just and fatal consequences;" adding, "for it is easy to prove, that the Antinomian is the only consistent *absolute predestinarian*."* That there are persons who profess the doctrine of absolute predestination, and who, from that consideration, may indulge themselves in the greatest enormities, is admitted. Dr. Priestley, however, allows, that these are "only such persons whose minds are previously depraved;" that is, wicked men, *who turn the grace of God into lasciviousness*. Nor are such examples "often" to be seen among us; and, where they are, it is commonly in such people who make no serious pretence to personal religion, but who have just so much of predestination in their heads, as to suppose that all things will be as they are appointed to be, and therefore that it is in vain to strive,—just so much as to look at the end, and overlook the means; which is as wide of Calvinism, as it is of Socinianism. This may be the *absolute* predestination which Dr. Priestley means; namely, a predestination to eternal life, let our conduct be ever so impure; and a predestination to eternal death, let it be ever so holy: and, if so, it is granted that the Antinomian is the only consistent believer in it: but then it might, with equal truth, be added, that he is the only person who believes in it at all. The Calvinistic doctrine of predestination supposes, that holiness of heart and life are as much the object of divine appointment as future happiness, and that this connexion can never be broken. To prove that the Antinomian is the only consistent believer in such a predestination as this, may not be so *easy* a task as barely to assert it. I cannot imagine it would be very easy, especially for Dr. Priestley; seeing he acknowledges, that "the idea of every thing being predestinated from all eternity is no objection to *prayer*, because all means are appointed as well

* Considerations on Difference of Opinion, § III.

as ends; and therefore, if prayer be in itself a proper means, the end to be obtained by it, we may be assured, will not be had without *this*, any more than without any other means, or necessary previous circumstances.."* Dr. Priestley may allege, that this is not *absolute* predestination: but it is as absolute as ours, which makes equal provision for faith and holiness, and for every mean of salvation, as this does for prayer.

Will Dr. Priestley undertake to prove, that *a loose, dissipated, and abandoned life is a more general thing among the Calvinists than among their opponents?* I am persuaded he will not. He knows that the Calvinists, in general, are far from being a dissipated, or an abandoned people, and goes about to account for it; and that, in a way that *shall reflect no honour upon their principles.* "Our moral conduct," he observes, "is not left at the mercy of our opinions; and the regard to virtue, that is kept up by those who maintain the doctrines above-mentioned, is owing to the influence of other principles implanted in our nature."† Admitting this to be true, yet one would think the worst principles will, *upon the whole*, be productive of the worst practices. They whose innate principles of virtue are all employed in counteracting the influence of a pernicious system, cannot be expected to form such amiable characters, as where those principles are not only left at liberty to operate, but are aided by a good system. It might, therefore, be expected, I say again, if our principles be what our opponents say they are, that a loose, dissipated, and abandaned life would be a more general thing among us than among them.

I may be told, that the same thing, if put to us, would be found equally difficult; or that, notwithstanding we contend for the superior influence of the Calvinistic system to that of Socinus, yet we should find it difficult to prove, that a loose, dissipated, and abandoned life is a more general thing among Socinians, than is is among Calvinists. And I allow, that I am not sufficiently acquainted with the bulk of the people of that denomination to hazard an assertion of this nature. But, if what is allowed by their own

* Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever, *Part* I. p. 111.

† Considerations on Difference of Opinion, § III.

writers (who ought to know them) may be admitted as evidence, such an assertion might, nevertheless, be supported. "Rational Christians are often represented," says Mr. Belsham, "as indifferent to practical religion." Nor does he deny the justice of this representation, but admits, though with apparent reluctance, that "there has been some plausible ground for the accusation;" and goes about to account for it, as we have seen in Letter IV. in such a way, however, *as may reflect no dishonour upon their principles.** The same thing is acknowledged by Dr. Priestley, who allows, that "a *great number* of the Unitarians of the present age are only men of good sense, and without much practical religion;" and that "there is a greater apparent conformity to the world in them, than is observable in others."† Yet he also goes about to account for these things, as Mr. Belsham does, in such a way *as may reflect no dishonour on their principles.* It is rather extraordinary that, when facts are introduced in favour of the virtue of the general body of the Calvinists, they are not denied, but accounted for in such a way that their principles must share none of the honor; and when facts of an opposite kind are introduced, in proof of the want of virtue in Unitarians, they also are not denied, but accounted for in such a way that their principles shall have none of the dishonor. Calvinism, it seems, must be immoral, though Calvinists be virtuous; and Socinianism must be amiable, though Socinians be vicious. I shall not inquire whether these very opposite methods of accounting for facts be fair or candid. On this the reader will form his own judgment: it is enough for me that the facts themselves are allowed.

If we look back to past ages, (to say nothing of those who lived in the earliest periods of Christianity, because I would refer to none but such as are allowed to have believed the doctrine in question,) I think it cannot be fairly denied, that the great body of holy men, who have maintained the true worship of God (if there was any true worship of God maintained,) during the Romish apostacy,

* Sermon, p. 32.

† Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 100.

and who, many of them, sacrificed their earthly all for his name, have lived and died in the belief of the deity and atonement of Christ. Our opponents often speak of these doctrines being embraced by the apostate church of Rome; but they say little of those who, during the long period of her usurpation, bore testimony for God. The *Waldenses*, who inhabited the vallies of Piedmont, and the *Albigenses*, who were aftewards scattered almost all over Europe, are allowed, I believe, on all hands, to have preserved the true religion in those darkest of times: and it is thought by some expositors, that these are the people who are spoken of in the twelfth chapter of the Revelation, under the representation of *a woman, to whom were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness—and there be nourished for a time, from the face of the serpent.* It was here that true religion was maintained, and sealed by the blood of thousands from age to age, when all the rest of the Christian world were *wondering after the beast.* And as to the doctrines which they held, they were much the same as ours. Among the adversaries to the church of Rome, it is true, there might be men of different opinions. Arius and others may be supposed to have had their followers in those ages; but the body of the people called *Waldenses* are not to be reckoned as such: on the contrary, the principles which they professed were, for substance, the same with those embraced afterwards by the Reformed Churches; as is abundantly manifest by several of their catechisms and confessions of faith, which have been transmitted to our times.

Mr. Lindsey, in his *Apology*, has given a kind of history of those who opposed the doctrine of the Trinity; but they make a poor figure during the above long and dark period, in which, if ever, a testimony for God was needed. He speaks of "churches and sects, as well as individuals, of that description, in the twelfth century:" and there might be such. But can he produce any evidence of their having so much virtue as to make any considerable *sacrifices* for God? Whatever were their number, according to Mr. Lindsey's own account, from that time till the Reformation, (a period of three or four hundred years, and during which the *Waldenses* and the *Wickliffites* were sacrificing every thing for the pres-

ervation of a good conscience,) they "were driven into corners and silence:"* that is, there is no testimony upon record which they bore, or any account of their having so much virtue in them as to oppose, at the expense of either life, liberty, or property, the prevailing religion of the times.

Mr. Lindsey speaks of "the famous *Abelard:*" but surely he must have been wretchedly driven for want of that important article, or he would not have ascribed it to a man who, as a late writer observes, "could with equal facility explain Ezekiel's prophecies, and compose amorous sonnets for Heloise; and was equally free to unfold the doctrine of the Trinity, and ruin the peace of a family, by debauching his patron's neice."† Mr. Lindsey also in the *Appendix to his Farewell Sermon to the Congregation in Essex-street*, lately published, holds up the piety of *Servetus*, by giving us one of his prayers addressed to Jesus Christ; in which he expresses his full persuasion, that he was under a *divine impulse* to write against his proper divinity. Surely, if Socinian piety had not been very scarce, Mr. Lindsey would not have been under the necessity of exhibiting the effusions of idolatry and enthusiasm, as examples of it.

Religion will be allowed to have some influence in the forming of a *national* character, especially that of the common people, among whom, if any where, it generalty prevails. Now, if we look at those nations where Calvinism has been most prevalent, it will be found, I believe, that they have not been distinguished by their immorality, but the reverse. *Geneva*, the *Seven United Provinces*, *Scotland*, and *North America*, (with the two last of which we may be rather better acquainted than with the rest,) might be alleged as instances of this assertion. With respect to *Scotland*, though other sentiments are said to have lately gained ground with many of the clergy; yet Calvinism is known to be generally prevalent among the serious part of the people. And, as to their national character, you seldom know an intelligent Englishman to have visited that country, without being struck with the pecul-

*Chap. I. p. 34.

†Mr. Robinson's Plea for the Divinity of Christ.

iar sobriety, and religious behaviour of the inhabitants. As to *America*, though, strictly speaking, they may be said to have no national religion, (a happy circumstance in their favour,) yet, perhaps, there is no one nation in the world, where Calvinism has more generally prevailed. The great body of the first settlers were Calvinists; and the far greater part of religious people among them, though of different denominations as to other matters, continue such to this day. And, as to the moral effects which their religious principles have produced, they are granted, on all hands to be considerable. They are a people, as the *Monthly Reviewers* have acknowledged,* "whose love of liberty is attempered with that of order and decency, and accompanied with the virtues of integrity, moderation, and sobriety. They know the necessity of regard to religion and virtue, both in principle and practice."

In each of these countries, it is true, as in all others, there are great numbers of irreligious individuals; perhaps, a majority: but they have a greater proportion of religious characters than most other nations can boast; and the influence which these characters have upon the rest, is as that of a portion of leaven, which leaveneth the whole lump.

The members of the Church of England, it may be taken for granted, were generally Calvinists, as to their doctrinal sentiments, at, and for some time after, the Reformation. Since that time, those sentiments have been growing out of repute; and Socinianism is suppposed, among other principles, to have prevailed considerably among the members of that community. Dr. Priestley, however, is often very sanguine in estimating the great numbers of Unitarians among them. Now, let it be considered, whether this change of principle has, in any degree, been serviceable to the interests of piety or virtue. On the contrary, did not a serious walking with God, and a rigid attention to morals, begin to die away, from the time that the doctrines contained in the Thirty-

* Review from May to August, 1793, p. 502.

nine Articles began to be disregarded?* And now, when Socinianism is supposed so have made a greater progress than ever it did before, is there not a greater degree of *perjury*, and more *dissipation* of manners, than at almost any period since the Reformation.

I am not insensible, that it is the opinion of Dr. Priestley, and of some others, that men grow better—that the world advances considerably in moral improvement: nay, Mr. Belsham seems to favour an idea, that, "in process of time, the earth may revert to its original paradisiacal state—and death itself be annihilated." This, however, will hardly be thought to prove any thing, except, that enthusiasm is not confined to Calvinists. And, as to men growing better, whatever may be the moral improvement of the world in general, Dr. Priestley some where acknowledges, that this is far from being the case with the Church of England, especially since the times of Bishop Burnet.

With respect to the *Dissenters*, were there ever men of holier lives than the generality of the *puritans* and *nonconformists* of the last two centuries? Can any thing, equal to their piety and devotedness to God, be found among the generality of the Socinians, of their time or of any time. In sufferings, in fastings, in prayers, in a firm adherence to their principles, in a close walk with God in their families, and in a series of unremitted labours for the good of mankind, they spent their lives.

But *fastings* and *prayers*, perhaps, may not be admitted as excellences in their character: it is possible they may be treated with ridicule. Nothing less than this is attempted by Dr. Priestley, in his Fifth Letter to Mr. Burn. "I could wish," says he "to quiet your fears, on your account. For the many sleepless nights which your apprehensions must necessarily have caused you, accompanied, of course, with much earnest *prayer* and *fasting*, must, in time, affect your health." Candour out of the question, Is this *piety?* It is said to be no uncommon thing for persons who

* The same sort of people who held Calvinistic doctrines, were at the same time so severe in their morals, that *Laud* found it necessary, it seems, to publish *The Book of Sports*, in order to counteract their influence on the nation at large.

have been used to pray extempore, when they have turned Socinians, to leave off that practice, and betake themselves to a written form of their own composition. This is formal enough, and will be thought by many to afford but slender evidence of their devotional spirit; but yet one would have supposed, they would not have dared to ridicule it in others, however destitute of it they might be themselves.

Dr. Priestley allows, that Unitarians are peculiarly wanting in *zeal* for religion * That this concession is just, appears not only from the indifference of great numbers of them in private life, but from the conduct of many of their preachers. It has been observed, that, when young ministers have become Socinians, they have frequently given up the ministry, and become schoolmasters, or any thing they could. Some who have been possessed of fortunes, have become mere private gentlemen. Several such instances have occurred, both among Dissenters and Churchmen. If they had true zeal for God and religion, why is it that they are so indifferent about preaching what they account the truth?

Dr Priestley farther allows, that Calvinists have "less *apparent* conformity to the world; and that they *seem* to have more of a real principle of religion than Socinians." But then he thinks the other have the most candour and benevolence; "so as, upon the whole, to approach nearest to the proper temper of Christianity." He "*hopes* also, they have more of a real principle of religion than they *seem* to have."† As to candour and benevolence, they will be considered in another Letter. At present it is sufficient to observe, that Dr. Priestley, like Mr. Belsham, on a change of character in his converts, is obliged to have recourse to *hope*, and to judge of things contrary to what they *appear* in the lives of men, in order to support the religious character of his party.

That a large proportion of serious people are to be found among Calvinists, Dr. Priestley will not deny; but Mrs. Barbauld goes farther. She acknowledges, in effect, that the seriousness which is to be found among Socinians themselves, is accompanied by a kind of secret attachment to our principles; an attachment which

* Discourses on Various Subjects, pp. 94, 95. †Ibid. pp. 100, 101.

their preachers and writers, it seems, have hitherto laboured in vain to eradicate. "These doctrines," she says, "it is true, among thinking people, are losing ground; but there is still apparent, in that class called *serious Christians*, a tenderness in exposing them; a sort of leaning towards them, as, in walking over a precipice, one should lean to the safest side; an idea that they are, if not true, at least good to be believed; and that a salutary error is better than a dangerous truth."* By the "class called serious Christians," Mrs. Barbauld cannot mean professed Calvinists; for they have no notion of leaning towards any system, as a system of salutary error, but consider that to which they are attached as being the truth. She must, therefore, intend to describe the serious part of the people of her own profession. We are much obliged to Mrs. Barbauld for this important piece of information. We might not so readily have known without it, that the hearts and consciences of the *serious part* of Socinians revolt at their own principles; and that, though they have rejected what we esteem the great doctrines of the gospel, in theory, yet they have an inward leaning towards them, as the only safe ground on which to rest their hopes. According to this account, it should seem that *serious Christians* are known by their predilection for Calvinistic doctrines; and that those "*thinking people*, among whom these doctrines are losing ground," are not of that class or description, being distinguished from them. Well, it does not surprise us to hear, that "those men who are the most indifferent to practical religion are the *first*, and serious Christians the *last*, to embrace the Rational system;" because it is no more than might be expected. If there be any thing surprising in the affair it is, that those who make these acknowledgments should yet boast of their principles, on account of their moral tendency.

I am, &c.

* Remarks on Wakefield's Inquiry.

LETTER VII.

THE SYSTEMS COMPARED, AS TO THEIR TENDENCY TO PROMOTE LOVE TO GOD.

Christian Brethren,

Our opponents, as you have doubtless observed, are as bold in their assertions, as they are liberal in their accusations. Dr. Priestley not only asserts that the Calvinistic system is "unfavorable to genuine piety, but to *every branch of vital practical religion.*"* We have considered, in the foregoing Letter, what relates to morality and piety in general: in the following Letters, we shall descend to particulars; and inquire, under the several specific virtues of Christianity, which of the systems in question is the most unfavorable to them.

I begin with Love. The love of God and our neighbour not only contains the sum of the moral law, but the spirit of true religion; it must therefore afford a strong presumption for or against a system, as it is found to promote or diminish these cardinal virtues of the Christian character. On both these topics, we are principally engaged on the defensive, as our views of things stand charged with being unfavorable to the love of both God and man. "There is something in your system of Christianity," says Dr. Priestley, in his *Letters to Mr. Burn*, "that debases the pure spirit of it, and does not consist with either the perfect veneration of the divine character, which is the foundation of true devotion to God; or perfect candour and benevolence to man." A very serious charge; and which, could it be substantiated, would, doubtless, afford a strong presumption, if not more than presumption, against us. But let the subject be examined. This Letter will be devoted to the first part of this heavy charge; and the following one, to the last.

* Considerations on Difference of Opinion, § III.

As to the question, Whether we feel a veneration for the divine character?—I should think, we ourselves must be the best judges. All that Dr. Priestley can know of the matter is, that *he* could not feel a perfect veneration for a being of such a character as we suppose the Almighty to sustain. That, however, may be true, and yet nothing result from it unfavorable to our principles. It is not impossible that Dr. Priestley should be of such a temper of mind as incapacitates him for admiring, venerating, or loving God, in his true character: and hence, he may be led to think, that all who entertain such and such ideas of God must be void of that perfect veneration for him which he supposes himself to feel. The true character of God, as revealed in the scriptures, must be taken into the account, in determining whether our love to God be genuine, or not. We may clothe the Divine being with such attributes, and such only, as will suit our depraved taste; and then it will be no difficult thing to fall down and worship him: but this is not the love of God, but of an idol of our own creating.

The principal objections to the Calvinistic system, under this head, are taken from the four following topics: The *atonement;* the *vindictive* character of God; the *glory* of God, rather than the happiness of creatures, being his last end in creation; and the *worship* paid to Jesus Christ.

First, the doctrine of *atonement*, as held by the Calvinists, is often represented, by Dr. Priestley, as detracting from the goodness of God, and as inconsistent with his *natural placability.* He seems always to consider this doctrine as originating in the want of love, or, at least, of a sufficient degree of love; as though God could not find in his heart to show mercy without a price being paid for it. "Even the elect," says he, "according to their system, cannot be saved, till the utmost effects of the divine wrath have been suffered for them by an innocent person.* Mr. Jardine also, by the title which he has given to his late publication, calling it, *The Unpurchased Love of God, in the Redemption of the World, by Jesus Christ;* suggests the same idea. When our opponents wish to make good the charge of our ascribing a natural implacability to the Di-

* Consideration on Difference of Opinion, § III.

vine Being, it is common for them either to describe our sentiments in their own language; or, if they deign to quote authorities, it is not from the sober discussions of prosaic writers, but from the figurative language of poetry. Mr. Belsham describes "the formidable chimera of our imagination, to which," he says, "we have annexed the name of *God the Father*, as a merciless tyrant."* They conceive of "God the Father," says Mr. Lindsey, "always with dread, as a being of severe, unrelenting justice, revengeful, and inexorable, without full satisfaction made to him for the breach of his laws. God the Son, on the other hand, is looked upon as made up of all compassion and goodness, interposing to save men from the Father's wrath, and subjecting himself to the extremest sufferings on that account." For proof of this, we are referred to *the poetry of Dr. Watts!*—in which he speaks of *the rich drops of Jesus' blood, that calm'd his frowning face; that sprinkled o'er the burning throne, and turn'd the wrath to grace:*—of *the infant Deity, the bleeding God,* and of *heaven appeas'd with flowing blood.*†

On this subject, a Calvinist might, without presumption, adopt the language of our Lord to the Jews: *I honor my Father, and ye do dishonor me.* Nothing can well be a greater misrepresentation of our sentiments, than this which is constantly given. These writers cannot be ignorant that Calvinists disavow considering the death of Christ as a cause of divine love, or goodness. On the contrary, they always maintain, that divine love is the cause, the first cause, of our salvation, and of the death of Christ, to that end. They would not scruple to allow, that God had love enough in his heart to save sinners without the death of his Son, had it been consistent with righteousness; but that, as receiving them to favor without some public expression of displeasure against their sin, would have been a dishonor to his government, and have afforded an encouragement for others to follow their example; *the love of God wrought in a way of righteousness:* first giving his only begotten Son to become a sacrifice, and then pouring forth all the

* Sermons on the Importance of Truth, pp. 33—35.

† Apology, (Fourth Edition,) p. 97—and Appendix to his Farewel Sermon, at Essex Street, p. 52.

fulness of his heart through that appointed medium. The incapacity of God to show mercy without an atonement, is no other than that of a righteous governor, who, whatever good-will he may bear to an offender, cannot admit the thought of passing by the offence, without some public expression of his displeasure against it; that, while mercy triumphs, it may not be at the expense of law and equity, and of the general good.

So far as I understand it, this is the light in which Calvinists consider the subject. Now, judge, brethren, whether this view of things represent the Divine Being as *naturally implacable?*—whether the gift of Christ to die for us be not the strongest expression of the contrary?—and whether this, or the system which it opposes, "give wrong impressions concerning the character and moral government of God?" Nay, I appeal to your own hearts, whether that way of saving sinners through an atonement, in which mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace embrace each other; in which God is *just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus;* do not endear his name to you more than any other representation of him that was ever presented to your minds? Were it possible for your souls to be saved in any other way; for the divine law to be relaxed, or its penalty remitted, without respect to an atonement; would there not be a virtual reflection cast upon the divine character? Would it not appear as if God had enacted a law that was so rigorous as to require a repeal, and issued threatenings which he was obliged to retract? or, at least, that he had formed a system of government without considering the circumstances in which his subjects would be involved; a system, "the strict execution of which would do more harm than good;" nay, as if the Almighty, on this account, were ashamed to maintain it, and yet had not virtue enough to acknowledge the remission to be an act of *justice;* but must, all along, call it by the name of *grace?* Would not the thought of such a reflection destroy the bliss of heaven, and stamp such an impression of *meanness* upon that character whom you are taught to adore, as would almost incapacitate you for revering or loving him?

It is farther objected, that, according to the Calvinistic system, God is *a vindictive being*, and that, as such, we cannot love him.

It is said, that we "represent God in such a light, that no earthly parent could imitate him, without sustaining a character shocking to mankind." That there is a mixture of the vindictive in the Calvinistic system, is allowed: but let it be closely considered, whether this be any disparagement to it? nay, rather, whether it be not necessary to its perfection? The issue, in this case, entirely depends upon the question, Whether vindictive justice be in itself amiable? If it be, it cannot render any system unamiable. "We are neither amused nor edified," says a writer in the Monthly Review, "by the coruscations of damnation. Nor can we by any means bring ourselves to think, with the late Mr. Edwards, that the vindictive justice of God is a glorious attribute."* This, however, may be very true, and vindictive justice be a glorious attribute, notwithstanding.

I believe it is very common for people, when they speak of vindictive punishment, to mean that kind of punishment which is inflicted from a wrathful disposition, or a disposition to punish for the pleasure of punishing. Now, if this be the meaning of our opponents, we have no dispute with them. We do not suppose the Almighty to punish sinners for the sake of putting them to pain. Neither scripture nor Calvinism conveys any such idea. Vindictive punishment, as it is here defended, stands opposed to that punishment which is merely *corrective:* the one is exercised for the good of the party; the other not so, but for the good of the community. Those who deny this last to be amiable in God, must found their denial either on scripture-testimony, or on the nature and fitness of things. As to the *former*, the scriptures will hardly be supposed to represent God as an unamiable being; if, therefore, they teach, that vindictive justice is an unamiable attribute, it must be maintained that they never ascribe that attribute to God. But with what colour of evidence can this be alleged? Surely, not from such language as the following: *The Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God. Our God is a consuming fire.—God is jealous, and the Lord* REVENGETH; *the Lord* REVENGETH, *and is furious; the Lord will take* VENGEANCE *on his*

* Review of Edwards' Thirty-three Sermons, March, 1791.

adversaries; and he reserveth wrath for his enemies.—Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger?—His fury is poured out like fire.—O Lord God, to whom VENGEANCE *belongeth: O God to whom* VENGEANCE *belongeth, show thyself!—He that showeth no mercy shall have judgment without mercy.—He that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no favour.—For we know him that hath said,* VENGEANCE *belongeth unto me, I will recompence, saith the Lord.—It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.—I lift up my hand to heaven, and say I live for ever. If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment, I will render* VENGEANCE *to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me.—The angels which kept not their first estate he hath reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day.—Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them, are set forth for an examyle, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.—The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking* VENGEANCE *on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

As to *the nature and fitness of things*, we cannot draw any conclusion from thence against the loveliness of vindictive justice, as a *divine* attribute, unless the thing itself can be proved to be unlovely. But this is contrary to the common sense and practice of mankind. There is no nation or people under heaven, but what consider it, in various cases, as both necessary and lovely. It is true, they would despise and abhor a magistrate, who should punish beyond desert; or who should avail himself of the laws of his country to gratify his own caprice, or his private revenge. This, however, is not vindictive justice, but manifest *injustice*. No considerate citizen, who values the public weal, could blame a magistrate for putting the penal laws of his country so far in execution, as should be necessary for the true honour of good government, the support of good order, and the terror of wicked men. When the inhabitants of Gibeah requested that the Levite

* Deut. iv. 24. Heb. xii. 29. Nahum i. 2. 6. Psa. xciv. 1. James ii. 13. Isa. xxvii. 11. Heb. x. 30, 31. Deut. xxxii. 40, 41. Jude 6, 7. 2 Thess. i. 8.

might be brought out to them, that they might *know him;* and, on their request not being granted, abused and murdered his companion; all Israel, as one man, not only condemned the action, but called upon the Benjamites to deliver up the criminals to justice. Had the Benjamites complied with their request, and had those sons of Belial been put to death, not for their own good, but for the good of the community, where had been the unloveliness of the procedure? On the contrary, such a conduct must have recommended itself to the heart of every friend of righteousness in the universe, as well as have prevented the shocking effusion of blood, which followed their refusal. Now, if vindictive justice may be glorious in a human government, there is no reason to be drawn from *the nature and fitness of things*, why it would not be the same in the divine administration.

But the idea on which our opponents love principally to dwell, is that of a *father*. Hence, the charge, that we "represent God in such a light that no earthly parent could imitate him, without sustaining a character shocking to mankind." This objection comes with an ill grace from Dr. Priestley, who teaches, that "God is the author of sin; and may do evil, provided it be with a view that good may come."* Is not this representing God in such a light, that no one could imitate him, without sustaining a character shocking to mankind? Whether Dr. Priestley's notions on this subject be true, or not, it is true that God's ways are so much above ours, that it is unjust, in many cases, to measure his conduct to a rebellious world, by that of a father to his children.

In this matter, however, God is imitable. We have seen already, that a good magistrate, who may justly be called the *father* of his people, ought not to be under the influence of blind affection, so as, in any case, to show mercy at the expense of the public good. Nor is this all: There are cases in which a parent has been obliged, in benevolence to his family, and from a concern for the general good, to give up a stubborn and rebellious son, to bring him forth with his own hands to the elders of his city, and

* Doctrine of Necessity, pp. 117—121.

there with his own lips bear witness against him; such witness, too, as would subject him not to a mere salutary correction, but to be stoned to death by the men of his city. We know, such a law was made in Israel;* and, as a late writer observed upon it, such a law "was wise and good:"† it was calculated to enforce in parents an early and careful education of their children; and if, in any instance, it was executed, it was *that all Israel might hear and fear!* And how do we know, but that it may be consistent with the good of the whole system, yea necessary to it, that some of the rebellious sons of men should, in company with apostate angels, be made *examples* of divine vengeance; that they should stand, like Lot's wife, as *pillars of salt*, or as everlasting monuments of God's displeasure against sin; and that, while their smoke riseth up for ever and ever, all the intelligent universe should *hear, and fear, and do no more so wickedly!* Indeed, we must not only know, that this *may* be the case, but, if we pay any regard to the authority of scripture, that it *is* so. If words have any meaning, this is the idea given us of the *angels which kept not their first estate, and of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrha; who are said to be set forth* FOR AN EXAMPLE, *suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.*‡

It belongs to the character of an all perfect being, who is the moral governor of the universe, to promote the good of the whole! but there may be cases, as in human governments, wherein the general good may be inconsistent with the happiness of particular parts. The case of robbers, of murderers, or of traitors, whose lives are sacrificed for the good of society, that the example of terror, afforded by their death, may counteract the example of immorality exhibited by their life, is no detraction from the benevolence of a government; but, rather, essential to it.

But how, after all, can we love such a tremendous being? I answer, A capacity to resent an injury is not always considered as a blemish, even in a *private character:* if it be governed by justice,

* Deut. xxi. 18—21.

† Mr. Robinson in his Sermon to the Young People at Willingham.

‡ Jude 6, 7.

and aimed at the correction of evil, it is generally allowed to be commendable. We do not esteem the favour of a man, if we consider him as incapable, on all occasions, of resentment. We should call him an easy soul, who is kind, merely because he has not sense enough to feel an insult. But, shall we allow it right and fit for a puny mortal thus far to know his own worth, and assert it; and, at the same time, deny it to the great Supreme, and plead for his being insulted with impunity?

God, however, in the punishment of sin, is not to be considered as acting in a merely *private capacity*, but as the universal moral governor; not as separate from the great system of being, but as connected with it; or as head and guardian of it. Now, in this relation, vindictive justice is not only consistent with the loveliness of his character, but essential to it. Capacity and inclination to punish a disorder in a state, are never thought to render an earthly prince less lovely in the eyes of his loyal and faithful subjects; but more so. That temper of mind, on the contrary which should induce him to connive at rebellion, however it might go by the name of benevolence and mercy, would be accounted by all the friends of good government, injustice to the public; and those who, in such cases, side with the disaffected and plead their cause, are generally supposed to be tainted with disaffection themselves.

A third objection is taken from the consideration of *the glory of God*, rather than the happiness of creatures, being his last end in creation. "Those who assume to themselves the distinguishing title of orthodox," says Dr. Priestley, "consider the Supreme Being as having created all things *for his glory*, and by no means for the general happiness of all his creatures."* If by the general happiness of *all* his creatures, Dr. Priestley means the general good of the universe, nothing can be more unfair than this representation. Those who are called orthodox never consider the glory of God as being at variance with the happiness of creation in general, nor with that of any part of it, except those who have revolted from the divine government: nor, if we regard the

* Considerations on Difference of Opinion, § III.

intervention of a mediator, with theirs, unless they prove finally impenitent, or, as Dr. Priestley calls them, "wilful and obstinate transgressors." The glory of God *consists*, with reference to the present case, in doing that which is best upon the whole. But if, by the general happiness of *all* his creatures, he means to include the happiness of those angels who kept not their first estate, and of those men who die impenitent; it is acknowledged, that what is called the orthodox system, does by no means consider this as an end in creation, either supreme or subordinate. To suppose that the happiness of *all* creatures, whatever might be their future conduct, was God's ultimate end in creation, (unless we could imagine him to be disappointed with respect to the grand end he had in view) is to suppose what is contrary to *fact*. All creatures, we are certain, are not happy in this world; and, if any regard is to be paid to revelation, all will not be happy in the next.

If it be alleged, that a portion of misery is necessary in order to relish happiness; that therefore, the miseries of the present life, upon the whole, are blessings; and that the miseries threatened in the life to come may be of the same nature, designed as a purgation, by means of which, sinners will at length escape the second death;—It is replied, All the miseries of this world are not represented as blessings to the parties, nor even all the good things of it. The drowning of Pharaoh, for instance, is never described as a blessing to him; and God declared that he had *cursed the blessings* of the wicked priests, in the days of the prophet Malachi. *All things*, we are assured, *work together for good;* but this is confined *to those who love God, and are called according to his purpose.* As to the life to come, if the miseries belonging to that state be merely temporary and purgative, there must be all along a mixture of love and mercy in them; whereas the language of scripture is, *He that hath showed no mercy, shall have judgment* WITHOUT MERCY.—*The wine of the wrath of God will be poured out* WITHOUT MIXTURE. Nay, such miseries must not only contain a *mixture* of love and mercy, but they themselves must be the effects and expressions of love; and then it will follow, that the foregoing language of limitation and distinction (which is found indeed throughout the bible) is of no account; and that blessings

and curses are the same things. Dr. Priestley himself speaks of "the laws of God as being guarded with awful sanctions;" and says, "that God will inflexibly punish all wilful and obstinate transgressors."* But how can that be called an *awful* sanction which only subjects a man to such misery as is necessary for his good? How, at least, can that be accounted *inflexible* punishment, in which the Divine Being all along aims at the sinner's happiness? We might as well call the operation of a surgeon in amputating a mortified limb, in order to save the patient's life, by the name of inflexible punishment, as those miseries which are intended for the good of the sinner. If that be their end, they are, strictly speaking, blessings, though blessings in disguise: and, in that case, as Dr. Edwards in his answer to Dr. Chauncy has fully proved, blessings and curses are in effect the same things.

As to our considering the Supreme Being as having created all things for his own glory, I hope it will be allowed that the scriptures *seem*, at least, to countenance such an idea. They teach us that *God made all things* FOR HIMSELF—that *all things are created by him, and* FOR HIM. He is expressly said to have created Israel (and if Israel, why not others?) FOR HIS GLORY. Not only *of him, and through him, but* TO HIM *are all things.* Glory, and honour, and power, are ascribed to him, by the elders and the living creatures; for, say they, *Thou hast created all things; and for* THY PLEASURE *they are and were created.*†

But farther, and what is more immediately to the point, I hope this sentiment will not be alleged as a proof of our want of *love to God;* for it is only assigning him the supreme place in the system of being; and Dr. Priestley himself elsewhere speaks of "the love of God, and a regard to his glory," as the same thing.‡ One should think, those, on the other hand, who assign the happiness of creatures as God's ultimate end, thereby giving him only a subordinate place in the system, could not allege this as an evidence of their love

* Considerations on Difference of Opinion, § III.

† Prov. xvi. 4, Col. i. 16. Isa. xliii. 7. Heb. ii. 10. Rom. xi. 36. Rev. iv. 11.

‡ Considerations on Difference of Opinion, § I.

to him. That place which God holds in the great system of being, he ought to hold in our affections; for we are not required to love him in a greater proportion than the place which he occupies requires. If it were otherwise, our affections must move in a preposterous direction. We ought, therefore, on this supposition, to love ourselves, our own happiness, and the happiness of our fellow-creatures, *more* than God; for God himself is supposed to do the same. But, if so, the great rule of human actions should have been different. Instead of requiring love to God in the *first* place, with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength; and *then*, love to ourselves and our neighbours; it should have been reversed. The song of the angels, too, instead of beginning with *Glory to God in the highest*, and ending with *peace on earth, and good will to men;* should have placed the last first, and the first last. How such a view of things can tend to promote *the love of God*, unless a subordinate place in our affections be higher than the supreme, it is difficult to conceive.

The great God, who fills heaven and earth, must be allowed to form the far greatest proportion, if I may so speak, of the whole system of being; for, compared with him, *all nations*, yea, all worlds, *are but as a drop of a bucket, or as a small dust of the balance.* He is the source, and continual support of existence in all its varied forms. As the great guardian of being in general, therefore, it is fit and right, that he should, in the first place, guard the glory of his own character and government. Nor can this be to the disadvantage of the universe, but the contrary; as will appear, if it be considered, that it is the glory of God to do that which shall be best upon the whole. The glory of God, therefore, connects with it the general good of the created system, and of all its parts, except those whose welfare clashes with the welfare of the whole.

If it were otherwise, if the happiness of *all* creatures where the great end that God from the beginning had in view, then, doubtless in order that this end might be accomplished, every thing else must, as occasion required, give way to it. The glory of his own character, occupying only a subordinate place in the system, if ever it should stand in the way of that which is supreme, must

give place, among other things. And if God have consented to all this, it must be because the happiness, not only of creation in general, but of every individual, is an object of the greatest magnitude, and most fit to be chosen: that is, it is better, and more worthy of God, as the governor of the universe, to give up his character for purity, equity, wisdom, and veracity, and to become vile and contemptible in the eyes of his creatures: It is better that the bands which bind all holy intelligences to him should be broken, and the cords which hold together the whole moral system be cast away, than that the happiness of a creature should, in any instance, be given up! Judge, ye friends of God, does this consist with "the most perfect veneration for the divine character?"

Once more: it seems to be generally supposed by our opponents, that *the worship we pay to Christ* tends to divide our hearts; and that in proportion as we adore him, we detract from the essential glory of the Father. In this view, therefore, they reckon themselves to exercise a greater veneration for God, than we. But it is worthy of notice, and particularly the serious notice of our opponents, that it is no new thing for an opposition to Christ to be carried on under the plea of *love to God.* This was the very plea of the Jews, when they took up stones to stone him. *For a good work*, said they, *we stone thee not, but for that thou, being a man, makest thyself* GOD. They very much prided themselves in their God; and, under the influence of that spirit, constantly rejected the Lord Jesus. *Thou art called a Jew, and makest thy boast of* GOD.—*We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even* GOD.—*Give* GOD *the praise: we know that this man is a sinner.* It was under the pretext of zeal and friendship for GOD, that they at last put him to death, as a *blasphemer.* But what kind of zeal was this; and in what manner did Jesus treat it? *If* GOD *were your Father*, said he, *ye would love me.—He that is of God heareth* GOD's *words.—It is my father that honoureth me, of whom ye say, that he is your* GOD; *yet ye have not known him.—I know you, that you have not the love of God in you.**

* Rom. ii. 17. John x. 33. viii. 41. ix. 24. viii 42, 47, 54, 55. v, 42.

Again: the primitive Christians will be allowed to have loved God aright; yet they worshipped Jesus Christ. Not only did the martyr Stephen close his life by committing his departed spirit into the hands of Jesus, but it was the common practice, in primitive times, to invoke his name. He hath authority, said Ananias concerning Saul, to bind *all that call on thy name.* One part of the Christian mission was to declare, that whoever should *call on the name of the Lord* should be saved; even of that Lord of whom the Gentiles had not heard. Paul addressed himself to *all that in every place called upon the name of Jesus Christ.* These modes of expression (which, if I be not greatly mistaken, always signify divine worship) plainly inform us, that it was not merely the practice of a few individuals, but of the great body of the primitive Christians, to invoke the name of Christ; nay, and that this was a mark by which they were distinguished as *Christians.**

Farther: It ought to be considered, that, in worshipping the Son of God, we worship him not on account of that wherein he differs from the Father, but on account of those perfections which we believe him to possess in common with him. This, with the consideration that we worship him not to the exclusion of the Father, any more than the Father to the exclusion of him, but as *one with him*, removes all apprehensions from our minds, that in ascribing glory to the one, we detract from that of the other. Nor can we think, but that these ideas are confirmed, and the weight of the objection removed, by those declarations of Scripture where the Father and the Son are represented as being in such union, that *he who hath seen the one, hath seen the other;* and *he who honoureth the one, honoureth the other;* yea, that *he who honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father who sent him.*†

* Acts ix. 14. compared with ver. 17. Rom. x. 11—14. 1 Cor. i. 2.

† John xiv. 7—9. v. 23. The reader may see this subject ably urged by Mr. Scott, in his Essays on the most important Subjects of Religion, First Edition, No. VII. pp. 96, 97. These *Essays* are of a piece with the other productions of that judicious writer; and, though small, and, for the convenience of the poor, sold for one penny each, contain a fund of solid, rational, and scriptural divinity.

It might fairly be argued, in favour of the tendency of Calvinistic doctrines to promote the love of God, that upon those principles, we have *more to love him for*, than upon the other. On this system, we have *much* to be forgiven; and, therefore, love much. The *expense* at which our salvation has been obtained, as we believe, furnishes us with a motive of love to which nothing can be compared. But this I shall refer to another place;* and conclude with reminding you, that, notwithstanding Dr. Priestley loads Calvinistic principles with such heavy charges as those mentioned at the beginning of this Letter, yet he, elsewhere, acknowledges them to be "generally favourable to that leading virtue, devotion;" which, in effect, is acknowledging them to be favourable to *the love of God*.

I am, &c.

* Letter XIV.

LETTER VIII.

ON CANDOUR AND BENEVOLENCE TO MEN.

Christian Brethren,

You recollect, that the Calvinistic system stands charged by Dr. Priestley, not only with being inconsistent with a perfect veneration of the divine character, but with "perfect candour and benevolence to man."

This, it must be owned, has often been objected to the Calvinists. Their views of things have been supposed to render them sour and ill natured towards those who differ from them. Charity, candour, benevolence, liberality, and the like, are virtues to which Socinians on the other hand, lay almost an exclusive claim. And such a weight do they give these virtues in the scale of morality, that they conceive themselves, "upon the whole, even allowing that they have more of an apparent conformity to the world than the Trinitarians, to approach nearer to the proper temper of Christianity than they."*

I shall not go about to vindicate Calvinists, any farther than I conceive their spirit and conduct to admit of a fair vindication; but I am satisfied, that, if things be closely examined, it will be found, that a great deal of what our opponents attribute to themselves, is not benevolence, or candour; and that a great deal of what they attribute to us, is not owing to the want of either.

Respecting *benevolence*, or *good will* to men, in order to be genuine, they must consist with love to God. There is such a thing as *partiality* to men, with respect to the points in which they and their Maker are at variance: but this is not benevolence. Partiality to a criminal at the bar might induce us to pity him, so far as to plead in extenuation of his guilt, and to endeavour to bring him off from the just punishment of the laws: but this would not be

* Dr. Priestley's diiscourses on Various Subjects, p. 100.

benevolence. There must be a *rectitude* in our actions and affections, to render them truly virtuous. Regard to the public good must keep pace with compassion to the miserable; else the latter will degenerate into vice, and lead us to be *partakers of other men's sins.* Whatever pretences be made to devotion, or love to God, we never admit them to be real, unless accompanied with love to men, neither ought any pretence of love to men to be admitted as genuine, unless it be accompanied with love to God. Each of these virtues is considered in the scriptures as an evidence of the other. *If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar.—By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.**

There is such a thing as *partiality* to men, as observed before, with respect to the points in which they and their maker are at variance; leaning to those notions that represent their sin as comparatively little, and their repentance and obedience as a balance against it; speaking smooth things, and affording intimations, that, without an atonement, nay, even without repentance in this life, all will be well at last. But, if it should prove that God is wholly in the right, and man wholly in the wrong; that sin is exceeding sinful; that we all deserve to be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord; and that, if we be not interested in the atonement of Christ, this punishment must actually take place: if these things, I say, should, at last, prove true, then all such notions as have flattered the pride of men, and cherished their presumption, instead of being honored with the epithets of liberal and benevolent, will be called by very different names. The princes and people of Judah would, doubtless, be apt to think the sentiment taught by Hananiah, who prophesied smooth things concerning them, much more benevolent and liberal than those of Jeremiah, who generally came with heavy tidings; yet true benevolence existed only in the latter.† Whether the complexion of the whole system of our opponents do not resemble that of the false prophets, who *prophesied smooth things, and healed the hurt of the daughter of Israel slightly, crying Peace,*

* John iv. 20. x. 2.

† Jer. xxviii.

peace; when there was no peace; and whether their objections to our views of things be not the same, for substance, as might have been made to the true prophets; let all who wish to know the truth, however ungrateful it may be to flesh and blood, decide.

A great deal of what is called *candour* and *benevolence* among Socinians, is nothing else but *indifference to all religious principle.* "If we could be so happy," says Dr. Priestley, "as to believe, that there are no errors but what men may be so circumstanced as to be *innocently* betrayed into; that any mistake of the head is very consistent with rectitude of heart; and that all differences in modes of worship may be only the different methods by which different men, (who are equally *the offspring of God,*) are endeavouring to honour and obey their common parent; our differences of opinion would have no tendency to lessen our mutual love and esteem."* This is, manifestly, no other than indifference to all religious principle. Such an indifference, it is allowed, would produce a temper of mind which Dr. Priestley calls candour and benevolence; but which, in fact, is neither the one, nor the other. Benevolence is *good will to men:* but good will to men is very distinct from a good opinion of their principles or their practices; so distinct, that the former may exist, in all its force, without the least degree of the latter. Our Lord thought very ill of the principles and practices of the people of Jerusalem; yet he *beheld the city, and wept over it.* This was genuine benevolence.

Benevolence is a very distinct thing from *complacency*, or *esteem.* These are founded on an approbation of character; the other is not. I am bound by the law of love to bear good will to men, as creatures of God, and as fellow-creatures, so as, by every mean in my power, to promote their welfare, both as to this life, and that which is to come; and all this, let their character be what it may. I am also bound to *esteem* every person, for that in him which is truly amiable, be he a friend or an enemy, and to put the best construction upon his actions that truth will admit; but no law obliges me to esteem a person respecting those things which I have reason to consider as erroneous or vicious. I may pity him, and ought to do so; but to esteem him, in those respects, would be

* Considerations on Difference of Opinion, § II.

contrary to the love of both God and man. Indifference to religious principle, it is acknowledged, will promote such esteem. Under the influence of that indifference, we may form a good opinion of various characters, which, otherwise, we should not do; but the question is, Would that esteem be right or amiable? On the contrary, if religious principle of any kind should be found necessary to salvation; and if benevolence consist in that good will to men which leads us to promote their real welfare, it must contradict it: for the welfare of men is promoted by thinking and speaking the truth concerning them. I might say, If we could be so happy as to think virtue and vice indifferent things, we should then possess a far greater degree of esteem for some men than we now do; but would such a kind of esteem be right, or of any use either to ourselves or them?

Candour, as it relates to the treatment of an adversary, is that temper of mind which will induce us to treat him openly, fairly, and ingenuously; granting him every thing that can be granted consistently with truth, and entertaining the most favourable opinion of his character and conduct that justice will admit. But what has all this to do with indifference to religious principle, as to matters of salvation? Is there no such thing as treating a person with fairness, openness, and generosity, while we entertain a very ill opinion of his principles, and have the most painful apprehensions as to the danger of his state? Let our opponents name a more candid writer of controversy than President Edwards; yet he considered many of the sentiments against which he wrote, as destructive to the souls of men, and those who held them, as being in a dangerous situation.

As a great deal of what is called candour and benevolence among Socinians, is merely the effect of indifference to religious principle; so a great deal of that in Calvinists, for which they are accused of the want of these virtues, is no other than *a serious attachment to what they account divine truth, and a serious disapprobation of sentiments which they deem subversive of it.* Now, surely, neither of these things is inconsistent with either candour or benevolence: if they be, however, Jesus Christ and his apostles are involved in the guilt, equally with the Calvinists. They cultiva-

ted such an attachment to religious principle, as to be in real earnest in the promotion of it; and constantly represented the knowledge and belief of it, as necessary to eternal life. *Ye shall know the truth*, said Christ, *and the truth shall make you free.—This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.—He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.** They also constantly discovered a marked disapprobation of those sentiments, which tended to introduce *another gospel*, so far as to declare that man accursed who should propagate them. They considered false principles as pernicious and destructive to the souls of men. *If ye believe not that I am he*, said Christ to the Jews, *ye shall die in your sins—and whither I go ye cannot come.* To the Galatians, who did not fully reject Christianity, but in the matter of justification were for uniting the works of the law with the grace of the gospel, Paul testified, saying, *If ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.*†

Had the apostle Paul considered "all the different modes of worship as what might be only the different methods of different men, endeavouring to honour and obey their common parent;" he would not have felt *his spirits stirred in him*, when he saw the city of Athens wholly given to idolatry: at least he would not have addressed the idolaters in such strong language as he did, *preaching to them that they should turn from these vanities unto the living God.* Paul considered them as having been all their life employed, not in worshipping the living God, only in a mode different from others, but *mere vanities.* Nor did he consider it as a "mere mistake of the head, into which they might have been innocently betrayed;" but as a *sin*, for which they were *without excuse*; a *sin* for which he called upon them, in the name of the living God to *repent.*‡

Now, if candour and benevolence be Christian virtues, which they doubtless are, one should think they must consist with the practice of Christ and his apostles. But, if this be allowed, the

* John viii. 32. xvii. 3. iii. 36.

† John vii. 21—24. Gal. i. 8. v. 2—4.

‡ Acts xvii. 16. xiv. 15. Rom. i. 20. Acts xvii. 30.

main ground on which Calvinists are censured will be removed; and the candour for which their opponents plead must appear to be spurious, and foreign to the genuine spirit of Christianity.

Candour and benevolence, as Christian virtues, must also consist with each other; but the candour of Socinians is destructive of benevolence, as exemplified in the scriptures. Benevolence in Christ and his apostles, extended not merely, nor mainly, to the bodies of men, but to their souls; nor did they think so favourably of mankind as to desist from warning and alarming them, but the reverse. They viewed the whole world as *lying in wickedness;* in a perishing condition; and hazarded the loss of every earthly enjoyment to rescue them from it, as from the jaws of destruction. But it is easy to perceive, that in proportion to the influence of Socinian candour upon us, we shall consider mankind, even the Heathens, as a race of virtuous beings, all worshipping the great Father of creation, only in different modes. Our concern for their salvation will consequently abate, and we shall become so indifferent respecting it, as never to take any considerable pains for their conversion. This, indeed, is the very truth with regard to Socinians. They discover, in general, no manner of concern for the salvation of either Heathens abroad or profligates at home. Their candour supplies the place of this species of benevolence, and not unfrequently excites a scornful smile at the conduct of those who exercise it.

The difference between our circumstances and those of Christ and his apostles, who were divinely inspired, however much it ought to deter us from passing judgment upon the hearts of individuals, ought not to make us think that every mode of worship is equally safe, or that religious principle is indifferent as to the affairs of salvation; for this would be to consider as false, what by divine inspiration, they taught as true.

Let us come to matters of fact. Mr. Belsham does not deny that Calvinists may be "pious, candid, and benevolent;" but he thinks they would have been *more so* if they had been Socinians. "They, and there are many such," says he, "who are sincerely pious, and diffusively benevolent *with* these principles, could not have failed to have been much *better*, and much happier, had

they adopted a milder, a more rational, a more truly evangelical creed."* Now, if this be indeed the case, one might expect, that the most perfect examples of these virtues are not to be looked for among us, but among our opponents: and yet it may be questioned, whether they will pretend to more perfect examples of piety, candour, or benevolence, than are to be found in the characters of a HALE, a FRANCK, a BRAINERD, an EDWARDS, a WHITEFIELD, a THORNTON, and a HOWARD, (to say nothing of the living) whose lives were spent in doing good to the souls and bodies of men; and who lived and died, depending on the atoning blood and justifying righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. The last of these great men, in whom his country glories, and who is justly considered as *the martyr of humanity*, is said thus to have expressed himself, at the close of his last will and testament: "My immortal spirit, I cast on the sovereign mercy of God, through Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of my strength, and, I trust, is become my salvation." He is said also to have given orders for a plain, neat stone to be placed upon his grave, with this inscription, *Spes mea Christus:* CHRIST IS MY HOPE!

We are often reminded of the persecuting spirit of Trinitarians, and particularly of *Calvin* towards *Servetus*. This example has been long held up by our opponents, not only as a proof of his cruel disposition, and odious character, but as if it were sufficient to determine what must be the turn and spirit of Calvinists in general. But, supposing the case to which they appeal were allowed to prove the cruelty of Calvin's disposition; nay, that he was, on the whole, a wicked man, destitute both of religion and humanity; what would all this prove as to the tendency of the system that happened to be called after his name, but which is allowed to have existed long before he was born? We regard what no man did or taught, as oracular, unless he could prove himself divinely inspired, to which Calvin never pretended. Far be from us to vindicate him, or any other man, in the business of persecution. We abhor every thing of the kind, as much as our opponents. Though the principles for which he contended appear to us, in the main, to be just; yet the weapons of his warfare, in this instance, were carnal.

* Sermon on the Importance of Truth. p. 30.

It ought, however, to be acknowledged, on the other side, and, if our opponents possessed all the candour to which they pretend, they would, in this, as well as in other cases, acknowledge, that persecution for religious principles was not at that time peculiar to any party of Christians; but common to all, whenever they were invested with civil power. It was an error, and a detestable one; but it was the error of the age. They looked upon heresy in the same light as we look upon those crimes which are inimical to the peace of civil society; and, accordingly, proceeded to punish heretics by the sword of the civil magistrate. If Socinians did not persecute their adversaries so much as Trinitarians, it was because they were not equally invested with the power of doing so. Mr. Lindsey acknowledges, that *Faustus Socinus* himself was not free from persecution, in the case of *Francis Davides*, superintendent of the Unitarian churches in Transylvania. Davides had disputed with Socinus on the invocation of Christ, and "died in prison, in consequence of his opinion, and some offence taken at his supposed indiscreet propagation of it from the pulpit. I wish I could say," adds Mr. Lindsey, "that Socinus, or his friend *Blandrata*, had done all in their power to prevent his commitment, or procure his release afterwards." The difference between Socinus and Davides was very slight. They both held Christ to be a mere man. The former, however, was for praying to him; which the latter, with much greater consistency, disapproved. Considering this, the persecution to which Socinus was accessary, was as great as that of Calvin; and there is no reason to think, but that, if Davides had differed as much from Socinus as Servetus did from Calvin, and if the civil magistrates had been for burning him, Socinus would have concurred with them. To this might be added, that the conduct of Socinus was marked with *disingenuity;* in that he considered the opinion of Davides in no very heinous point of light; but was afraid of increasing the odium under which he and his party already lay, among other Christian churches.*

* Mr. Lindsey's Apology, pp. 153—156.

Mr. Robinson, in his *Ecclesiastical Researches*, has given an account of both these persecutions: but it is easy to perceive the prejudice under which he wrote. He evidently inclines to extenuate the conduct of Socinus, while he includes every possible circumstance that can, in any manner, blacken the memory of Calvin. Whatever regard we may bear to the latter, I am persuaded we should not wish to extenuate his conduct in the persecution of Servetus; or to represent it in softer terms, nor yet so soft, as Mr. Robinson has represented that of the former, in the persecution of Davides.

We do not accuse Socinianism of being a persecuting system, on account of this instance of misconduct in Socinus: nor is it any proof of the superior candour of our opponents, that they are continually acting the very reverse towards us. As a *Baptist*, I might indulge resentment against *Cranmer*, who caused some of that denomination to be burned alive: yet, I am inclined to think, from all that I have read of Cranmer, that, notwithstanding his conduct in those instances, he was, upon the whole, of an amiable disposition. Though he held with Pædobaptism, and in this manner defended it, yet I should never think of imputing a spirit of persecution to Pædobaptists in general; or of charging their sentiment, in that particular, with being of a persecuting tendency. It was the opinion—that *erroneous religious principles are punishable by the civil magistrate*, that did the mischief, whether at Geneva, in Transylvania, or in Britain; and to this, rather than to Trinitarianism, or to Unitarianism, it ought to be imputed.

We need not hold, with Mr. Lindsey, "the innocence of error," in order to shun a spirit of persecution. Though we conceive of error, in many cases, as criminal in the sight of God, and as requiring admonition, yea, exclusion from a *religious* society; yet, while we reject all ideas of its exposing a person to *civil* punishment, or inconvenience, we ought to be acquitted of the charge of persecution. Where the majority of a religious society consider the avowed principles of an individual of that society as being fundamentally erroneous, and inconsistent with the united worship and well-being of the whole; it cannot be persecution to endeavour,

by scriptural arguments, to convince him; and, if that cannot be accomplished, to exclude him from their communion.

It has been suggested, that to think the worse of a person on account of his sentiment, is a species of persecution, and indicates a spirit of bitterness at the bottom, which is inconsistent with that benevolence which is due to all mankind. But, if it be persecution to think the worse of a person, on account of his sentiments, (unless no man be better, or worse, whatever sentiments he imbibes, which very few will care to assert,) then it must be persecution for us to think of one another according to truth. It is also a species of persecution of which our opponents are guilty, as well as we, whenever they maintain the superior moral tendency of their own system. That which is adapted and intended to do good to the party, cannot be persecution, but genuine benevolence.—Let us suppose a number of travellers, all proposing to journey to one place. A number of different ways present themselves to view, and each appears to be the right way. Some are inclined to one; some, to another; and some contend that, whatever smaller difference there may be between them, they all lead to the same end. Others, however, are persuaded, that they do *not* terminate in the same end, and appeal to a correct map of the country, which points out a number of by-paths, resembling those in question, each leading to a fatal issue. Query, Would it be the part of benevolence, in this case, for the latter to keep silence, and hope the best; or to state the evidence on which their apprehensions were founded, and to warn their fellow-travellers of their danger?

There are, it is acknowledged, many instances of a want of candour and benevolence among us; over which it becomes us to lament. This is the case, especially with those whom Dr. Priestley is pleased to call "the only consistent absolute predestinarians." I may add, there has been, in my opinion, a great deal too much haughtiness and uncandidness discovered by some of the Trinitarians of the Established Church, in their controversies with Socinian Dissenters.—These dispositions, however, do not belong to them as Trinitarians, but as Churchmen. A slight observation of human nature will convince us, that the adherents to a religion established by

law, let their sentiments be what they may, will always be under a powerful temptation to take it for granted that they are right, and that all who dissent from them are contemptible sectaries, unworthy of a candid and respectful treatment. This temptation, it is true, will not have equal effect upon all in the same community. Serious and humble characters will watch against it; and, being wise enough to know that real worth is not derived from any thing merely external, they may be superior to it. But those of another description will be very differently affected.

There is, indeed, a mixture of evil passions in all our religious affections, against which it becomes us to watch and pray. I see many things in those of my own sentiments, which I cannot approve ; and possibly, others may see the same in me. And, should the Socinians pretend to the contrary, with respect to themselves, or aspire at a superiority to their neighbors, it may be more than they are able to maintain. It cannot escape the observation of thinking and impartial men, that the candour of which they so frequently boast, is pretty much confined to their own party, or those that are near akin to them. Socinians can be candid to Arians, and Arians to Socinians, and each of them to Deists ; but, if Calvinists expect a share of their tenderness, let them not greatly wonder, if they be disappointed. There need not be a greater, or a more standing proof of this, than the manner in which the writings of the latter are treated in the Monthly Review.

It has been frequently observed, that, though Socinian writers plead so much for candour and esteem among professing Christians, yet, generally speaking, there is such a mixture of scornful contempt discovered towards their opponents, as renders their professions far from consistent. Mr. Lindsey very charitably accounts for our errors, by asserting, that, "the doctrine of Christ being possessed of two natures, is the fiction of ingenious men, *determined, at all events, to believe Christ to be a different being from what he really was, and uniformly declared himself to be ;* by which fiction of theirs, they elude the plainest declarations of scripture concerning him, and *will prove him to be the Most High God, in spite of his own most express and constant language to the contrary.*— And, as there is no reasoning with such persons, they are to be

pitied, and considered as being under a debility of mind in this respect, however sensible and rational in others."* Would Mr. Lindsey wish to have this considered as a specimen of Socinian candour? If Mrs. Barbauld had been possessed of candour equal to her ingenuity, instead of supposing, that Calvinists derive their ideas of election, the atonement, future punishment, &c. from the tyranny and caprice of an eastern despot, she might have admitted, whether they were right or not, that those principles appeared to them to be taught in the Bible.†

If we may estimate the candour of Socinians, from the Spirit discovered by Mr. *Robinson*, in the latter part of his life, the conclusion will not be very favourable to their system. At the time when this writer professed himself a Calvinist, he could acknowledge those who differed from him, with respect to the divinity of Christ, "as mistaken brethren;" at which time, his opponents could not well complain of his being uncandid. But, when he comes to change his sentiments on that article, he treats those from whom he differs, in a very different manner; loading them with every species of abuse. Witness his treatment of *Augustine;* whose conduct, previously to his conversion to Christianity, though lamented with all the tokens of penitential sorrow, and entirely forsaken in the remaining period of his life, he industriously represents to his disadvantage; calling him "a pretended saint, but an illiterate hypocrite, of wicked dispositions;" loading his memory, and even the very country where he lived, with every opprobrious epithet that could be devised.‡ Similar instances might be added from his *Ecclesiastical Researches,* in which the characters of *Calvin* and *Beza* are treated in an equally uncandid manner.§

* Catechist. Inquiry 6.

† A friend of mine, on looking over Mrs. Barbauld's Pamphlet, in answer to Mr. Wakefield, remarks as follows: "Mrs. B. used to call Socinianism, *The frigid zone of Christianity;* but she is now got far north herself. She is amazingly clever: her language enchanting; but her caricature of Calvinism is abominable."

‡ History of Baptism, p. 652.

§ Mr. Robinson, in his *Notes on Claude*, observes, Mr. Burgh, that "Whatever occurs in modern writers of History, of a narrative nature, we find to

Dr. Priestley himself, who is said to be the most candid man of his party, is seldom overloaded with this virtue, when he is dealing with Calvinists. It does not discover a very great degree of perfection in this, or even in common civility, to call those who consider its principles as pernicious, by the name of "bigots," "the bigots," &c. which he very frequently does. Nor is it to the credit of his *impartiality*, any more than of his candour, when weighing the moral excellence of Trinitarians and Unitarians against each other, as in a balance, to suppose "the former to have *less*, and the latter something *more*, of a real principle of religion, than they seem to have.* This looks like taking a portion out of one scale, and casting it into the other, for the purpose of making weight where it was wanting.

Dr. Priestley, in answer to Mr. *Burn on the person of Christ*, acquits him of "any thing base, disingenuous, immoral, or wicked;" and, seeing Mr. Burn had not acquitted him of all such things in return, the Doctor takes occasion to boast, that his "principles, whatever they are, are more *candid* than those of Mr. Burn."† But, if this acknowledgment, candid as it may seem, be compared with another passage in the same performance, it will appear to less advantage. In Letter V. the Doctor goes about to account for the *motives* of his opponents; and if the following language do not insinuate any thing "base, immoral, or wicked," to have in-

* Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 100.

† Familiar Letters, *Letter* xviii.

be an inference from a system, previously assumed, without any view to the seeming truth of the fact recorded; but to the establishment of which the historian appears, through every species of misrepresentation, to have zealously directed his force. The subversion of freedom was the evident purpose of Mr. Hume, in writing the *History of England*. I fear we may with too much justice, affirm the subversion of Christianity to be the object of Mr. Gibbon, in writing his *History of the Decline and fall of the Roman Empire*," Vol. II, pp. 147. 141. Perhaps it might, with equal propriety, be added that the subversion of what is commonly called orthodoxy, and the vindication or palliation, of every thing which, in every age, has been called by the name of heresy, where the objects of Mr. Robinson in writing his *History of Baptism*, and what has since been published under the title of *Ecclesiastical Researches*.

fluenced Mr. Burn, it may be difficult to decide what baseness, immorality, or wickedness is. "As to Mr. Burn's being willing to have *a gird at me*, as Falstaff says, it may easily be accounted for. He has a view to rise in his profession ; and, being a man of good natural understanding and good elocution, but having had no advantage of education, or family connexions, he may think it necessary to do something, in order to make himself conspicuous ; and he might suppose, he could not do better than follow the sure steps of those who had succeeded in the same chase before him." What can any person make of these two passages put together ? It must appear, either that Dr. Priestley accused Mr. Burn of motives, of which, in his conscience he did not believe him to be guilty ; or that he acquitted him of every thing base and wicked, not because he thought him innocent, but merely with a view to glory over him, by affecting to be under the influence of superior candour and generosity.

The manner in which Dr. Priestley treated Mr. *Badcock*, in his *Familiar Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham*, holding him up as an immoral character, at a time when, unless some valuable end could have been answered by it, his memory should have been at rest, is thought to be very far from either candour or benevolence. The Doctor and Mr. Badcock seem to have been, heretofore upon friendly terms, and not very widely asunder as to sentiment. Private letters pass between them ; and Mr. Badcock always acknowledges Dr. Priestley his superior. But, about 1783, Mr. Badcock opposes his friend, in the *Monthly Review*, and is thought, by many, to have the advantage of him. After this he is said to act scandalously and dishonestly. He dies : and, soon after his death, Dr. Priestley avails himself of his former correspondence, to expose his dishonesty ; and, as if this were not enough, supplies from his own conjectures, what was wanting of fact, to render him completely odious to mankind.

Dr. Priestley may plead, that he has held up "the example of this unhappy man as a warning to others." So, indeed he speaks ; but thinking people will suppose, that if this *Zimri* had not *slain his master, his bones might have rested in peace.* Dr. Priestley had just cause for exposing the author of a piece, signed *Theodosius*, in the manner he has done in those Letters. Justice to himself re-

quired this ; but what necessity was there for exposing Mr. Badcock ? Allowing that there was sufficient evidence to support the heavy charge, wherein does this affect the merits of the cause ? Does proving a man a villain answer his arguments ? Is it worthy of a generous antagonist to avail himself of such methods to prejudice the public mind ? Does it belong to a controvertist to write his opponent's history, after he is dead, and to hold up his character in a disadvantageous light, so as to depreciate his writings ?

Whatever good opinion Socinian writers may entertain of the ability and integrity of some few individuals who differ from them, it is pretty evident that they have the *candour* to consider the body of their opponents as either *ignorant* or *insincere*. By the Poem which Mr. Badcock wrote in praise of Doctor Priestley, when he was, as the Doctor informs us, his "humble admirer," we may see in what light we are considered by our adversaries. Trinitarians, among the *Clergy*, are there represented, as "sticking fast to the Church for the sake of a living ;" and those whom the writer calls orthodox, popular preachers," (which, I suppose may principally refer to *Dissenters* and *Methodists*,) are described as *fools* and *enthusiasts* ; as either "staring, stamping, and damming in nonsenses ;" or else, "whining out the tidings of salvation ; telling their auditors that grace is cheap, and works are all an empty bubble." All this is published by Dr. Priestley, in his *Twenty-second Letter to the Inhabitants of Birmingham ;* and that without any marks of disapprobation. Dr. Priestley himself, though he does not descend to so low and scurrilous a manner of writing as the above, yet suggests the same thing, in the Dedication of his *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity*. He there praises Dr. Jebb, for his "attachment to the unadulterated principles of Christianity, how unpopular soever they may have become, through the prejudices of the *weak* or the *interested* part of mankind."

After all, it is allowed, that Dr. Priestley is, in general, and especially when he is not dealing with a Calvinist, a fair and candid opponent : much more so than the *Monthly Reviewers :* who, with the late Mr. Badcock, seem to rank among his "humble admi-

rers."* Candid and open, however, as Dr. Priestley in general is, the above are, certainly, no very trifling exceptions: and, considering him as excelling most of his party in this virtue, they are sufficient to prove the point for which they are alleged; namely, that when Socinians profess to be more candid than their opponents, their profession includes more than their conduct will justify.

I am, &c.

* About eight or nine years ago, the Monthly Review was at open war with Dr. Priestley; and the Doctor, like an incensed monarch, summoned all his mighty resources to expose its weakness, and to degrade it in the eye of the public. The conductors of the Review, at length, finding, it seems, that their country was nourished by the King's country, desired peace. They have ever since very punctually paid him tribute, and the conqueror seems very well contented, on this condition, to grant them his favour and protection.

LETTER IX.

THE SYSTEMS COMPARED, AS TO THEIR TENDENCY TO PROMOTE HUMILITY.

Christian Brethren,

You recollect the prophecy of Isaiah, in which speaking of Gospel times, he predicts, that *the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day;* as if it were one peculiar characteristic of the true gospel, to lay low the pride of man. The whole tenour of the New Testament enforces the said idea. *Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence.—Jesus said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.—Where is boasting? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay, but by the law of faith.** It may be concluded, with certainty, from these passages and various others of the same import, that the system which has the greatest tendency to promote this virtue, approaches nearest to the true gospel of Christ.

Pride, the opposite of humility, may be distinguished, by its objects, into natural and spiritual. Both consist in a too high esteem of ourselves: the one, on account of those accomplishments which are merely natural, or which pertain to us as men; the other on

* 1 Cor. i. 26—29. Matt. xi, 25. Rom. iii. 27.

account of those which are spiritual, or which pertain to us as good men. With respect to the first, it is not very difficult to know who they are, that ascribe most to their own understanding; that profess to believe in nothing but what they can comprehend; that arrogate to themselves the name of *Rational Christians;* that affect to "pity all those who maintain the doctrine of two natures in Christ, as being under a debility of mind in this respect, however sensible and rational in others;"* that pour compliments extravagantly upon one another;† that speak of their own party as the wise and learned, and of their opponents as the ignorant and illiterate, who are carried away by vulgar prejudices;‡ that tax the sacred writers with "reasoning inconclusively," and writing "lame accounts;" and that represent themselves as men of far greater compass of mind than they, or than even Jesus Christ himself!

The last of these particulars may excite surprise. Charity, that hopeth all things, will be ready to suggest, surely, no man that calls himself a Christian, will dare to speak so arrogantly. I acknowledge, I should have thought so, if I had not read in Dr. Priestley's *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity*, as follows: "Not that I think that the sacred writers were *Necessarians*, for they were not *philosophers;* not even our Saviour himself, as far as appears:—But their habitual devotion naturally led them to refer all things to God, without reflecting on the rigorous meaning of their language; and, very probably, had they been interrogated on the subject, they would have appeared not to be apprised of the Necessarian scheme, and would have answered in a manner unfavourable to it."§ The sacred writers, it seems, were well-meaning persons; but, at the same time, so ignorant, as not to know the meaning of their own language; nay, so ignorant, that, had it been explained to them, they would have been incapable of taking it in!

*Mr. Lindsey's Chatechist, Inquiry 6.

† Mr. Toulmin's Sermon on the Death of Mr. Robinson, pp. 47, 56.

‡ Mr. Belsham's Sermon on the Importance of Truth, pp. 4. 32.

§ Doctrine of Necessity, p. 133.

Nor is this suggested of the sacred writers only; but, as it should seem, of Jesus Christ himself. A very fit person Jesus Christ must be, indeed, to be addressed as *knowing all things;* as a *revealer* of the mind of God to men; as *the wisdom of God;* as he in whom *it pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell;* by whom the judges of the earth are exhorted to be *instructed;* and who shall *judge the world* at the last day; when, in fact, he was so ignorant, as not to consider the meaning of his own language; or, if he had been interrogated upon it, would not have been apprised of the extent of the scheme to which his words naturally led, but would probably have answered in a manner unfavourable to it! Is this the language of one that is *little in his own eyes?*

But there is such a thing as *spiritual* pride, or a too high esteem of ourselves on account of spiritual accomplishments; and this, together with a spirit of *bigotry*, Dr. Priestley imputes to Trinitarians. "Upon the whole," says he, "considering the great mixture of spiritual pride and bigotry in some of the most zealous Trinitarians, I think the moral character of Unitarians in general, allowing that there is in them a greater apparent conformity to the world than is observable in others, approaches more nearly to the proper temper of Christianity. It is more cheerful, more benevolent, and more candid. The former have probably less, and the latter, I hope, somewhat more, of a real principle of religion, than they seem to have."* To this it is replied,

First: If Trinitarians be proud at all, it seems it must be of their spirituality; for as to rationality, they have none, their opponents having, by a kind of exclusive charter, monopolized that article. It is their misfortune, it seems, when investigating the doctrine of the person of Christ, to be under a "debility of mind," or a kind of periodical insanity.

Secondly: Admitting that a greater degree of spiritual pride exists among Trinitarians, than among their opponents; if we were, for once, to follow Dr. Priestley's example, it might be accounted for without any reflection upon their principles. Pride is a sin that easily besets human nature, though nothing is more opposite

* Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 100.

to the spirit that becomes us: and, whatever it is in which a body of men excel, they are under a peculiar temptation to be proud of that, rather than of other things. The English people have been often charged, by their neighbours, with pride on account of their civil constitution; and, I suppose, it has not been without reason. They have conceived themselves to excel other nations in that particular; have been apt to value themselves upon it; and to undervalue their neighbours more than they ought. This has been their fault: but it does not prove their civil constitution has not, after all, its excellences. Nay, perhaps, the reason why some of their neighbours have not been so proud, in this particular, as they, is, they have not had that to be proud of. Christians, in general, are more likely to be the subjects of spiritual pride, than avowed Infidels; for, the pride of the latter, though it may rise to the highest pitch imaginable, will not be in their *spirituality*. The same may be said of Socinians. For, while "a great number of them are only men of good sense, and with much practical religion," as Dr. Priestley acknowledges they are,* their pride will not be in their spirituality, but in their supposed rationality.

Thirdly: Let it be considered, whether our doctrinal sentiments do not bear a nearer affinity to those principles which, in scripture, are constantly urged as motives to humility, than those of our opponents. The doctrines inculcated by Christ and his apostles, in order to lay men low in the dust before God, were those of human depravity, and salvation by free and sovereign grace, through Jesus Christ. The language held out by our Lord, was that he *came to seek and to save that which was lost*. The general strain of his preaching tended to inform mankind, not only that he came to save *lost* sinners; but, that no man, under any other character, could partake of the blessings of salvation. *I came* saith he *not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.* To the same purpose, the Apostle of the Gentiles declared to the Ephesians, *You hath he*

* Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 100.

quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins: wherein, in time past, ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. Nor did he speak this of Gentiles or of Profligates only; but, though himself a Jew, and educated a Pharisee, he added, *Among whom also we had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath even as others.* To the doctrine of the universal depravity of human nature, he very properly and joyfully proceeds to oppose that of God's rich mercy. *But God who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.* The humbling doctrine of salvation by undeserved favour, was so natural an inference from these premises, that the Apostle could not forbear throwing in such a reflection, though it were in a parenthesis: *By grace ye are saved!* Nor did he leave it there, but presently after drew the same conclusion more fully: *For by grace ye are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. Not of works lest any man should boast.** To the same purport he taught in his other Epistles. *Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.—Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.—Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.*†

These, we see, were the sentiments by which Christ and his apostles taught men humility, and cut off boasting. But, as though it were designed in perfect opposition to the apostolic doctrine, Socinian writers were constantly exclaiming against the Calvinistic system, because it maintains the insufficiency of a good moral life, to recommend us to the favour of God. "Repentance, and a good

* Ephes. ii. 1—9.

† 2 Tim. i. 9. Titus iii. 5. 1 Cor. i. 30, 31.

life," says Dr. Priestley, "are of *themselves* sufficient to recommend us to the divine favour."* "When," says Mrs. Barbould, "will Christians permit themselves to believe, that the same conduct which gains them the approbation of good men here, will secure the favour of heaven hereafter? When a man like Dr. Price is about to resign his soul into the hands of his Maker, he ought to do it not only with a reliance on his mercy, but his *justice*. It does not become him to pay the blasphemous homage of deprecating the wrath of God, when he ought to throw himself into the arms of his love."† "Other foundation than this can no man lay:" says Dr. Harwood, "all hopes founded upon any thing else than a good moral life, are merely imaginary."‡ *So they wrap it up.* If a set of writers united together, and studied to form an hypothesis in perfect contradiction to the holy scriptures, and the declared humbling tendency of the gospel, they could not have hit upon a point more directly to their purpose. The whole tenor of the gospel says, *It is* NOT *of works, lest any man should boast:* But Socinian writers maintain, that it *is* of works, and of them only; that in this, and in no other way, is the divine favour to be obtained. We might ask, *Where is boasting then? Is it excluded?* NAY; Is it not admitted and cherished?

Christ and his apostles inculcated humility, by teaching the primitive Christians that *virtue itself* was not of ourselves, but the gift of God. They not only expressly declared this with respect to faith, but the same in effect, of every particular included in the general notion of true godliness. *As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself*, said Christ, *except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in me:* for *without me ye can do nothing.—We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.—He worketh in us both to will and to do, of his good pleasure.*§ The manifest design of these important sayings was, to humble the primitive Christians, and to make them feel their entire depen-

*History of the corruption of Christianity, Vol. I. p. 155.

† Answer to Mr. Wakefield. ‡ Sermons, p. 193.

§ John xv. 4, 5. Ephes. ii. 10. Phil. ii. 13.

dence upon God for virtue, even for every *good thought*. *Who maketh thee to differ?* said the Apostle, *and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?** The Calvinistic system it is well known, includes the same things : but where is the place for them, or where do they appear, in the system of our opponents ? Dr. Priestley, in professed opposition to Calvinism, maintains, " that it depends entirely upon a man's *self*, whether he be virtuous or vicious, happy or miserable :"† that is to say, it is a man's self that maketh him to differ from another ; and he has that (namely, virtue,) which he did not receive, and in which, therefore he may glory.‡

Dr. Priestley replies to this kind of reasoning, " When we consider ourselves as *the workmanship of God;* that all our powers of body and of mind are derived from him ; that he is *the giver of every good and of every perfect gift;* and that without him we can do and enjoy nothing ; how can we conceive ourselves to be in a state of greater dependence, or obligation ; that is, what greater reason or foundation can there possibly be for the exercise of *humility?* If I believe that I have a power to do the duty that God requires of me ; yet, as I also believe that that power is his

* 1 Cor. iv. 7. † Doctrine of Necessity, p. 153.

‡ It is true, Dr. Priestley himself sometimes allows, that virtue is *not our own*, and does *not arise from within ourselves;* calling that mere *heathen Stoicism*, which maintains the contrary : and tells us, that " those persons, who from a principle of religion, ascribe more to God, and less to man, are persons of the greatest elevation in piety." *On Necessity*, pp. 107, 108. Yet, in the same performance, he represents it as a part of the Necessarian scheme by which it is opposed to Calvinism, that " it depends entirely upon a man's self, whether he be virtuous or vicious," p. 153. If Dr. Priestley mean no more by these expressions, than that our conduct in life, whether virtuous or vicious, depends upon our choice, the Calvinistic scheme, as well as his own allows of it. But, if he mean that a virtuous choice originates in ourselves, and that we are the proper cause of it, this can agree to nothing but the Armenian notion of a self-determining power in his will ; and that, in fact, as he himself elsewhere observes, is " mere *heathen Stoicism*, which allows men to pray for external things, but admonishes them, that, as for virtue it *is our own*, and must arise *from within ourselves*, if we have it at all." p. 69.

gift, I must still say, *What have I that I have not received? how then can I glory as if I had not received it?*"*

It is true, Dr. Priestley, and for aught I know, all other writers, except Atheists, acknowledge themselves indebted to God for the powers by which virtue is attained, and, perhaps, for the means of attaining it; but this is not acknowledging that we are indebted to him for virtue itself. Powers and opportunities are mere natural blessings: they have no virtue in them, but are a kind of talent, capable of being improved, or not improved. Virtue consists, not in the possession of natural powers, any more than in health, or learning, or riches; but in the use that is made of them. God does not therefore, upon this principle, give us virtue. Dr. Priestley contends, that, as we are "God's *workmanship*, and derive all our powers of body and mind from him, we cannot conceive of ourselves as being in a state of greater dependence upon him." The Apostle Paul, however teaches the necessity of being *created in Christ Jesus unto good works*. According to Paul, we must become his *workmanship* by a new creation in order to the performance of good works: but according to Dr. Priestley, the first creation is sufficient. Now, if so, the *difference* between one man and another is not to be ascribed to God: for it is supposed, that God has given all men the powers of attaining virtue; and that the difference between the virtuous man and his neighbour is to be ascribed to himself, in making a good use of the powers and opportunities with which he was invested. Upon this system, therefore, we may justly answer the question, *What hast thou which thou hast not received?* 'I have *virtue*, and the promise of eternal life as its reward; and consequently, have whereof to glory.' In short, the whole of Dr. Priestley's concessions amount to nothing more than the heathen Stoicism which he, elsewhere condemns. Those ancient philosophers could not deny, that all their powers were originally derived from above; yet they maintained, "that, as for virtue, it is *our own*, and must arise *from within ovrselves*, if we have it at all."

* Considerations on Difference of Opinion, § III.

I do not deny that all men have natural powers, together with means and opportunities of doing good; which, if they were but completely well-disposed, are equal to the performance of their whole duty. God requires no more of us, than to love and serve him with ALL *our strength*. These powers and opportunities render them accountable beings, and will leave them without excuse at the last day. But, if they are *not* rightly disposed, all their natural powers will be abused; and the question is, To whom are we indebted for *a change of disposition?* If to God, we have reason to lie in the dust, and acknowledge, it was he that *quickened us when we were dead in sins*: if to ourselves, the doctrine of the Stoics will be established, and we shall have *whereof to glory*.

I am, &c.

LETTER X.

ON CHARITY : IN WHICH IS CONSIDERED THE CHARGE OF BIGOTRY.

Christian Brethren,

The main reason why we are accused of spiritual pride, bigotry, uncharitableness, and the like, is, the *importance* which we ascribe to some of our sentiments. Viewing them as essential to Christianity, we cannot, properly speaking, acknowledge, as Christians, those who reject them. It is this which provokes the resentment of our opponents, and induces them to load us with opprobrious epithets. We have already touched upon this topic, in the *Letter on Candour,* but will now consider it more particularly.

It is allowed, that we ought not to judge of whole bodies of men, by the denomination under which they pass; because names do not always describe the real principles they embrace. It is possible, that a person who attends upon a very unsound ministry, may not understand or adopt so much of the system which he hears inculcated, as that his disposition shall be formed, or his conduct regulated, by it. I have heard, from persons who have been much conversant with Socinians, that, though, in general, they are of a loose, dissipated turn of mind, assembling in the gay circles of pleasure, and following the customs and manners of the world; yet that there are some among them who are more serious; and that these, if not in their conversation, yet, in their solemn addresses to the Almighty, incline to the doctrines of Calvinism. This perfectly accords with Mrs. Barbauld's representation of the matter, as noticed towards the close of the *Sixth Letter.* These people are not, properly speaking, Socinians; and, therefore, ought to be left quite out of the question. For the question is, Whether, as

believing in the deity and atonement of Christ, with other correspondent doctrines, we be required, by the charity inculcated in the gospel, to acknowledge, as fellow-christians, those who thoroughly and avowedly reject them?

It is no part of the business of this Letter, to prove that these doctrines are true; this, at present, I have a right to take for granted. The fair state of the objection, if delivered by a Socinian, would be to this effect: 'Though your sentiments should be right, yet, by refusing to acknowledge, as fellow-christians, others who differ from you, you over-rate their importance, and so violate the charity recommended by the gospel.' To the objection, as thus stated, I shall endeavour to reply.

Charity, it is allowed, will induce us to put the most favourable construction upon things, and to entertain the most favourable opinion of persons, that truth will admit. It is far from the spirit of Christianity, to indulge a censorious temper, or to take pleasure in drawing unfavourable conclusions against any person whatever; but the tenderest disposition towards mankind cannot convert truth into falsehood, or falsehood into truth. Unless, therefore, we reject the bible, and the belief of *any* thing as necessary to salvation; though we should stretch our good opinion of men to the greatest lengths, yet we must stop elsewhere. Charity itself does not so *believe all things*, as to disregard truth and evidence. We are sometimes reminded of our Lord's command, *Judge not, lest ye be judged.* This language is, doubtless, designed to reprove a censorious disposition, which leads people to pass *unjust* judgment, or, to discern *a mote in a brother's eye, while they are blind to a beam in their own:* but it cannot be intended to forbid *all* judgment whatever, even upon characters; for this would be contrary to what our Lord teaches in the same discourse, warning his disciples to *beware of false prophets, who would come to them in sheep's clothing:* adding, *Ye shall know them by their fruits.** Few pretend, that we ought to think favourably of *profligate* characters; or, that it is any breach of charity to think unfavourably concerning them. But, if the words of our Lord be understood as forbid-

* Matt. vii. 1—3. 15, 16.

ding *all judgment whatever* upon characters, it must be wrong to pass any judgment upon them. Nay, it must be wrong for a minister to declare to a drunkard, a thief, or an adulterer, that, if he die in his present condition, he must perish; because this is judging the party not to be in a state of salvation.

All the use that is commonly made of our Lord's words, is in favour of *sentiments*, not of *actions:* but the scriptures make no such distinction. Men are there represented as being under the wrath of God, who have *not believed* on the name of the only-begotten Son of God; nor is there any thing intimated in our Lord's expressions, as if the judgment which he forbade his disciples to pass, were to be confined to matters of sentiment. The judgment which is there reproved, is *partial* or *wrong* judgment, whether it be on account of sentiment, or of practice. Even those who plead against judging persons on account of sentiment, (many of them at least,) allow themselves to think unfavourably of avowed Infidels, who have heard the gospel, but continue to reject it. They themselves, therefore, do judge unfavourably of men on account of their sentiments; and must do so, unless they will reject the bible, which declares unbelievers to be under condemnation.

Dr. Priestley, however, seems to extend his favourable opinion to idolaters and Infidels, without distinction. "All differences in modes of worship," he says, "may be only the different methods by which different men (who are equally the *offspring of God*) are endeavouring to honour and obey their common parent."* He also inveighs against a supposition, that the mere holding of any *opinions* (so, it seems, the great articles of our faith must be called) should exclude men from the favour of God. It is true, what he says is guarded so much, as to give the argument he engages to support a very plausible appearance; but withal so ill directed, as not in the least to affect that of his opponents. His words are these: "Let those who maintain that the mere holding of any *opinions*, (without regard to the *motives and state of mind* through which men may have been led to form them,) will necessarily

* Considerations on Difference of Opinion, § II.

exclude them from the favour of God, be particularly careful with respect to the premises from which they draw so alarming a conclusion." The counsel contained in these words is, undoubtedly, very good. Those premises ought to be well founded, from whence such a conclusion is drawn. I do not, indeed, suppose, that any ground for such a conclusion exists; and who they are that draw it I cannot tell. The *mere* holding of an opinion, considered abstractly from the motive, or state of mind of him that holds it, must be simply an exercise of intellect; and, I am inclined to think, has in it neither good nor evil. But the question is, Whether there be not truths, which, from the nature of them, cannot be rejected, without an evil bias of heart? And, therefore, where we see those truths rejected, Whether we have not authority to conclude, that such rejection must have arisen from an evil bias?

If a man say, *There is no God*, the scripture teaches us to consider it, rather as the language of his *heart* than simply of his judgment, and makes no scruple of calling him a *fool;* which, according to the scriptural idea of the term, is equal to calling him a *wicked man.* And let it be seriously considered, upon what other principle our Lord could send forth his disciples to *preach the gospel to every creature*, and add, as he did, *He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; and he that believeth not, shall be damned.* Is it not here plainly supposed, that the gospel was accompanied with such evidence, that no intelligent creature could reject it, but from an evil bias of heart, such as would justly expose him to damnation? If it had been possible for an intelligent creature, after hearing the gospel to think Jesus an impostor, and his doctrine a lie, without any evil motive, or corrupt state of mind; I desire to know how the Lord of glory is to be acquitted of something worse than bigotry in making such a declaration.

Because the mere holding of an opinion, irrespective of the motive or state of mind in him that holds it, is neither good nor evil, it does not follow, that "all differences in modes of worship may be only the different methods by which different men are endeavouring to honour and obey their common parent." The latter includes more than the former. The performance of worship con-

tains more than the mere holding of an opinion: for it includes an exercise of the heart. Our Lord and his apostles did not proceed on any such principle, when they went forth preaching the gospel; as I hope has been sufficiently proved in the *Letter on Candour*. The principles on which they proceeded were, *An assurance that they were of God, and that the whole world were lying in wickedness.—That he who was of God would hear their words; and he that was not of God would not hear them.—That he who believed their testimony, set to his seal that God was true; and he that believed it not, made God a liar.*

If we consider a belief of the gospel, in those who hear it, as essential to salvation, we shall be called bigots: but, if this be bigotry, Jesus Christ and his apostles were bigots; and the same outcry might have been raised against them, by both Jews and Greeks, as is now raised against us. Jesus Christ himself said to the Jews, *If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins*: and his apostles went forth with the same language. They wrote and preached, that men *might believe that Jesus was the Christ; and that, believing, they might have life through his name.* Those who embraced their testimony, they treated as in a state of salvation; and those who rejected it were told, that they had *judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life.* In short, they acted as men fully convinced of the truth of what their Lord had declared in their commission; *He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned.*

To all this an unbelieving *Jew* might have objected in that day, with quite as good a grace as Socinians object in this: "These men think that our salvation depends upon receiving their opinions! Have we not been the people of God, and in a state of salvation, time out of mind, without believing that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God? Our fathers believed only in general, that there was a Messiah to come; and were, no doubt, saved in that faith. 'We also believe the same, and worship the same God; and yet, according to these bigots, if we reject their opinion concerning Jesus being the Messiah, we must be *judged unworthy of everlasting life.*

A *Heathen* also, suppose one of Paul's hearers at Athens, who had just heard him deliver the discourse at Mars-hill, (recorded in Acts xvii. 22—31.) might have addressed his countrymen in some such language as the following: 'This Jewish stranger, Athenians, pretends to make known to us THE UNKNOWN GOD. Had he been able to make good his pretensions, and had this been all, we might have been obliged to him. But this *unknown God*, it seems, is to take place of all others that are known, and be set up at their expense. You have hitherto, Athenians, acted worthy of yourselves; you have liberally admitted all the gods to a participation of your worship: but now, it seems, the whole of your sacred services is to be engrossed by one. You have never been used to put any restraint upon *thought*, or *opinion;* but, with the utmost freedom have ever been in search of *new things*. But this man tells us, we OUGHT NOT TO THINK *that the Godhead is like unto silver or gold;* as though we were bound to adopt his manner of thinking, and no other. You have been famed for your adoration of the gods; and to this even your accuser himself has borne witness: yet he has the temerity to call us to *repentance* for it. It seems, then, we are considered in the light of *criminals*—criminals on account of our *devotions*—criminals for being *too* religious, and for adhering to the religion of our ancestors! Will Athenians endure this? Had he possessed the *liberality* becoming one who should address an Athenian audience, he would have supposed, that, however we might have been hitherto mistaken in our devotions, yet our intentions were good; and that "all the differences in modes of worship, as practised by Jews and Athenians, (who are equally, by his own confession, *the offspring of God*,) may have been only different methods by which we have been endeavouring to honour and obey our common parent." Nor is this all: for we are called to repentance, BECAUSE *this unknown God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world*, &c. So, then, we are to renounce our principles and worship, and embrace his, on pain of being called to give an account of it before a divine tribunal. Future happiness is to be confined to his sect; and our eternal welfare depends upon our embracing his opinions! Could your ears have

been insulted, Athenians, with an harangue more replete with "*pride, arrogance, and bigotry?*"

"But to say no more of this insulting language, the *importance* he gives to his opinions, if there were no other objection, must ever be a bar to their being received at Athens. You, Athenians, are friends to *free inquiry*. But, should our philosophers turn Christians, instead of being famous, as heretofore, for the search of *new truth*, they must sink into a state of mental stagnation. "Those persons who think that their salvation depends upon holding their present opinions must necessarily entertain the greatest dread of *free inquiry*. They must think it to be hazarding their eternal welfare, to listen to any arguments, or to read any books, that savour of idolatry. It must appear to them in the same light as listening to any other temptation, whereby they would be in danger of being seduced to their everlasting destruction. This temper of mind cannot but be a foundation for the most deplorable bigotry, obstinacy and ignorance."

The Athenians, I doubt not, will, generally, abide by the religion of their forefathers: but, should any individuals think of turning Christians, I trust that they will never adopt that illiberal principle of making their opinion necessary to future happiness. While this man and his followers hold such a notion "of the *importance* of their present sentiments, they must needs live in the dread of all free inquiry; whereas we, who have not that idea of the importance of our present setiments, preserve a state of mind proper for the discussion of them. If we be wrong, as our minds are under no strong bias, we are within the reach of conviction; and thus are in the way to grow wiser and better as long as we live."

By the above it will appear, that the Apostle Paul was just as liable as we are to the charge of bigotry. Those parts which are marked with double reversed commas are, with only an altearation of the word *heresy* to that of *idolatry*, the words of Dr. *Priestley*, in the *Second Section* of his *Considerations on Differences of Opinion*. Judge, brethren, whether these words best fit the lips of a Christian minister, or of a heathen caviller. The consequences alleged, by the supposed Athenian, against Paul, are far from just, and might be easily refuted: but they are the same, for substance

as those alleged by Dr. Priestley against us; and the premises from which they are drawn are exactly the same.

From the whole, I think, it may be safely concluded, if there be any sentiments taught us in the new testament in a clear and decided manner, this is one: That the Apostles and primitive preachers considered the belief of the gospel which they preached, as necessary to the salvation of those who heard it.

But, though it should be allowed, that a belief of the gospel is necessary to salvation, it will still be objected, That Socinians believe the Gospel, as well as others; their Christianity, therefore ought not to be called in question on this account. To this it is replied, If what Socinians believe be indeed the gospel; in other words, if it be not deficient in what is essential to the gospel; they, undoubtedly, ought to be acknowledged as Christians; but, if otherwise, they ought not. It has been pleaded, by some who are not Socinians, that we ought to think favourably of all who profess to embrace Christianity, in *general*, unless their conduct be manifestly immoral. But we have no such criterion afforded us in the new testament; nor does it accord with what is there revealed. The new testament informs us of various *wolves in sheep's clothing*, who appeared among the primitive Christians; men who professed the Christian name, but yet were, in reality, enemies to Christianity; who *perverted the gospel of Christ*, and introduced *another gospel* in its place.

But these men, it is said, not only taught false doctrine, but led *immoral lives*. If by *immoral* be meant grossly wicked, they certainly did not all of them answer to that character. The contrary is plainly supposed in the account of the false Apostles among the Corinthians; who are called *deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light: therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness.** I would not here be understood as drawing a comparison between the false apostles and the Socinians. My design, in

* 2 Cor. xi. 13—15.

this place, is not to insinuate any specific charge against them, but merely to prove, that, if we judge favourably of the state of every person who bears the Christian name, and whose exterior moral character is fair, we must judge contrary to the scriptures.

To talk of forming a favourable judgment from a profession of Christianity *in general*, is as contrary to reason and common sense, as it is to the New Testament. Suppose a candidate for a seat in the House of Commons, on being asked his political principles, should profess himself a friend to *liberty in general.* A freeholder inquires, 'Do you disapprove, sir, of taxation without representation?' 'No.' 'Would you vote for a reform in Parliament?' 'No.' 'Do you approve of the liberty of the press?' 'No.' Would this afford satisfaction? Is it not common for men to admit that in the gross, which they deny in detail? The only question that can fairly be urged is, Are the doctrines which Socinians disown (supposing them to be true) of such importance, that a rejection of them would endanger their salvation?

It must be allowed, that these doctrines may be what we consider them, not only true, but *essential* to Christianity. Christianity, like every other system of truth, must have some principles which are essential to it: and, if those in question be such, it cannot justly be imputed to pride or bigotry, it cannot be uncharitable, or uncandid, or indicate any want of benevolence, to think so. Neither can it be wrong to draw a natural and necessary conclusion, that those persons who reject these principles are not Christians. To think justly of persons is, in no respect, inconsistent with an universal good will towards them. It isnot, in the least, contrary to charity, to consider unbelievers in the light in which the scriptures represent them; nor those who reject what is essential to the gospel, asr ejectingthe gospel itself.

Dr. Priestley will not deny, that Christianity has its *great truths*, though he will not allow the doctrines in question to make any part of them, "The being of a God—his constant over-ruling providence, and righteous moral government—the divine origin of the Jewish and Christian revelations—that Christ was a teacher sent from God—that he is our master, law-giver, and judge—that God raised him from the dead—that he is now exalted at the right hand of

God—that he will come again, to raise all the dead, and sit in judgment upon them—and that he will then give to every one of us according to our works:—"These," he says, "are properly speaking, the *only great truths of religion:* and to these not only the *Church of England*, and the *Church of Scotland*, but even the *Church of Rome*, gives its assent."* We see here, that Dr. Priestley not only allows, that there are certain great truths of religion, but determines what, and what "only," they are. I do not recollect, however, that the false teachers in the churches of Galatia denied any one of these articles; and yet, without rejecting some of the *great* and *essential* truths of Christianity, they could not have *perverted* the gospel of Christ, or have introduced *another gospel*.

But Dr. Priestley, it seems, though he allows the above to be *great truths*, yet considers nothing as *essential* to Christianity, but *a belief of the divine mission of Christ*. "While a man believes," he says, "in the divine mission of Christ, he might with as much propriety be called a Mahometan, as be denied to be a Christian."† To call Socinians *Mahometans*, might, in most cases, be improper: they would still, however, according to this criterion of Christianity, be within the pale of the church; for Mahomet himself, I suppose, never denied the divine mission of Christ, nor very few of those doctrines which Dr. Priestley calls "the *only* great truths of religion." The Doctor informs us, that "some people consider him, already, as half a Mahometan."‡ Whether this be just or unjust, according to *his* notions of Christianity, a Mahometan is to be considered as more than half a Christian? He ought, if the above criterion be just, to be acknowledged as a fellow christian; and the whole party, instead of being ranked with heathenish and Jewish unbelievers, as they are by this same writer,§ ought to be considered as a sect, or denomination of Christians. The Doctor, therefore, need not have stopped at the *Church of Rome*, but might have added the *Church of Constantinople*, as agreeing in his "only great truths of religion."

* Familiar Letters, *Letter*, XXII.

† Considerations on difference of opinion ¶V.

‡ Preface to Letters to Mr. Burn,

§ Familiar Letters, *Letter* XVII. Conclusion.

I scarcely need to draw the conclusion which follows from what has been observed: If not only those who *perverted the gospel* among the Galatians, did, but even the *Mahometans* may acknowledge those truths which Dr. Priestley mentions, they cannot be the *only* great, much less the *distinguishing* truths of the Christian religion.

The difference between Socinians and Calvinists, is not about the mere circumstantials of religion. It respects nothing less than the *rule* of faith, the *ground* of hope, and the *object* of worship. If the Socinians be right, we are not only superstitious devotees, and deluded dependents upon an arm of flesh,* but habitual idolaters. On the other hand, if we be right, they are guilty of refusing to subject their faith to the decisions of heaven; of rejecting the only way of salvation; and of secreligiously depriving the Son of God of his essential glory. It is true, they do not deny our Christianity on account of our supposed idolatry; but for this no reason can be assigned, except their indifference to religious truth, and the Deistical turn of their sentiments.

If the proper deity of Christ be a divine truth, it is a great and a fundamental truth in Christianity. Socinians, who reject it, very consistently reject the worship of Christ with it. But worship enters into the essence of religion; and the worship of Christ, according to the New Testament, into the essence of the Christian religion. The primitive Christians ar echaracterized by their *calling upon the name of the Lord Jesus.* The Apostle when writing to the Corinthians, addressed himself *to the church of God at Corinth, to them that were sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place* CALLED UPON THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD.† That this is designed as a description

* Jer. xxvii. 5.

† Mr. Lindsey's observation, that *Called upon the name of Christ*, should be rendered, *Called by the name of Christ*, if applied to Rom. x. 13, would make the scriptures promise salvation to every one that is *called* a Christian. Salvation is promised to all who *believe, love, fear,* and *call upon the name of the Lord;* but never are the possessors of it described by a mere accidental circumstance, in which they are not voluntary, and in which, if they were, there is no virtue.

of true Christians will not be denied; but this description does not include Socinians, seeing they call not upon the name of Christ. The conclusion is, Socinians would not have been acknowledged, by the Apostle Paul, as true Christians.

If the deity of Christ be a divine truth, it must be the Father's will, that all men should honour the Son, in the same sense, and to the same degree, as they honour the Father; and those who honour him not as God, will not only be found opposing the divine will, but are included in the number of those who, by refusing to honour the Son, *honour not the Father who hath sent him*: which amounts to nothing less, than that the worship which they pay to the Father, is unacceptable in his sight.

If the deity of Christ be a divine truth, he is the object of *trust*; and that not merely in the character of a witness, but as *Jehovah, in whom is everlasting strength.* This appears to be another characteristic of true Christians in the New Testament. *In his name shall the Gentiles trust.—I know whom I have trusted; and that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him.—In whom ye also trusted, after ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.** But, if it be a characteristic of true Christianity so to trust in Christ, as to commit the salvation of our souls into his hands; how can we conceive of those as true Christians, who consider him only as a fellow-creature; and, consequently, place no such confidence in him?

If men by nature be in a *lost* and *perishing* condition; and if Christ came to seek and save them under those characters, as he himself constantly testified: then, all those that were whole in their own eyes, and seemed to need no physician, as the Scribes and Pharisees of old, must necessarily be excluded from an interest in his salvation. And in what other light can those persons be considered, who deny the depravity of their nature, and approach the Deity without respect to an atoning Saviour?—Further:

If the death of Christ, as an atoning sacrifice, be the only way of a sinner's salvation; if there be *no other name given under heaven, or among men, by which we must he saved;* if this be the

* Matt. xii. 21. 2 Tim. i. 12. Ephes. i. 12. 13.

foundation which God hath laid in Zion; and if no other will stand in the day of trial; how can we conceive, that those who deliberately disown it, and renounce all dependence upon it for acceptance with God, should yet be interested in it? Is it supposable, that they will partake of that *forgiveness of sins*, which believers are said to receive *for his sake, and through his name*, who refuse to make use of that name in any of their petitions?

If the doctrine of atonement by the cross of Christ be a divine truth, it constitutes the very substance of the gospel; and, consequently, is essential to it. The doctrine of the cross is represented in the New Testament, as the grand peculiarity, and the principal glory of Christianity. It occupies a large proportion among the doctrines of scripture, and is expressed in a vast variety of language. Christ *was delivered for our offences, wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities.—He died for our sins.—By his death purged our sins*—is said to *take* (or bear) *away the sins of the world*—to have *made peace through the blood of his cross—reconciled us to God by his death—redeemed us by his blood —washed us from our sins in his own blood—by his own blood obtained eternal redemption for us—purchased his church by his own blood*, &c. &c. This kind of language is so interwoven with the doctrine of the New Testament, that, to explain away the one, is to subvert the other. The doctrine of the cross is described as being, not merely an important branch of the gospel, but *the gospel itself. We preach Christ crucified; to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness: but to them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.—I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified.*—An *enemy to the cross of Christ*, is only another mode of describing an enemy to the gospel.* It was reckoned a sufficient refutation of any principle, if it could be proved to involve in it the consequence of Christ's having *died in vain.*† Christ's *dying for our sins*, is not only declared to be a divine truth, *according to the scriptures*, but a truth of such importance, that the then *present standing*, and the *final salvation* of the Corinthians, were

* 1 Cor. i. 23, 24. ii. 2. † Gal. ii. 21.

suspended upon their adherence to it.* In fine, the doctrine of the cross is the central point in which all the lines of evangelical truth meet, and are united. What the sun is to the system of nature, that the doctrine of the cross is to the system of the gospel; it is the LIFE of it. The revolving planets might as well exist and keep their course, without the attracting influence of the one, as a gospel be exhibited worthy of the name, that should leave out the other.

I am aware that Socinian writers do not allow the doctrine of the *atonement*, to be signified by that of the *cross*. They would tell you, that they believe in the doctrine of the cross; and allow it to have a *relative* or *subordinate* importance, rendering the truth of Christ's resurrection more evident, by cutting off all pretence that he was not really dead.† Whether this meagre sense of the praise will agree with the design of the Apostle, in this and various other passages in the New-Testament; whether it contains a sufficient ground for that singular *glorying* of which he speaks, or any principle by which *the world was crucified to him, and he unto the world*, let the impartial judge. But, be this as it may, the question here is not whether the doctrine of atonement be signified by that of the cross; but, supposing it to be so, whether it be of such importance as to render a denial of it a virtual denial of Christianity?—Once more:

If we believe in the absolute necessity of *regeneration*, or, that a sinner must be renewed in the spirit of his mind, or never enter into the kingdom of God; in what light must we consider those who plead for a reformation only, and deny the doctrine of a supernatural divine influence, by which a *new heart is given us, and a new spirit is put within us?* Ought we, or can we, consider them as the subject of a divine change, who are continually ridiculing the very idea of it?

It is common for our opponents to stigmatize us with the name of *Bigots*. Bigotry, if I understand it, is a blind and inordinate attachment to one's opinions. If we be attached to principles on account of their being *our's*, or because *we* have adopted them,

* 1 Cor. xv. 1—3.

† Dr. Priestley's Sermon on Glorying in the Cross.

rather than because they appear to us to be taught in the holy scriptures; if we be attached to *some* peculiar principles to the neglect of *others*, or so as to give them a greater proportion in the system than they require; if we consider things as being of greater importance than the scriptures represent them; if we obstinately adhere to our opinions, so as to be averse to free inquiry, and not open to conviction; if we make so much of principles as to be inattentive to holy practice; or if a difference in religious sentiment destroy or damp our benevolence to the persons of those from whom we differ; in any of these cases, we are subject to the charge of bigotry. But we may consider a belief of certain doctrines as necessary to salvation, without coming under any part of the above description. We may be attached to these doctrines, not because we have already embraced them, but on account of their appearing to us to be revealed in the scriptures: we may give them only that degree of importance in our views of things, which they occupy there: we may be so far friends to free inquiry, as impartially to search the scriptures, to see whether these things be true; and so open to conviction, as to relinquish our sentiments when they are proved to be unscriptural. We may be equally attached to practical goodness, as to the principles on which it is founded; and, notwithstanding our ill opinion of the religious sentiments of men, and our apprehensions of the danger of their condition, we may yet bear good will to their persons, and wish for nothing more than an opportunity of promoting their welfare, both for this life and that which is to come.

I do not pretend that Calvinists are free from bigotry; neither are their opponents. What I here contend for, is, That their considering a belief of certain doctrines as necessary to salvation, unless it can be proved that they make more of these doctrines than the scriptures make of them, ought not to subject them to such a charge.

What is there of bigotry in our not reckoning the Socinians to be Christians, more than in their reckoning us *idolators?* Mr. Madan complains of the Socinians "insulting those of his principles with the charge of idolatry." Dr. Priestley justified them by observing, "All who believe Christ to be a man, and not God,

must necessarily think it idolatrous to pay him divine honours; and to *call* it so, is no other than the necessary consequence of avowing our belief." Nay, he represents it as ridiculous, that they should "be allowed to think the Trinitarians idolators, without being permitted to call them so."* If Socinians have a right to think Trinitarians idolaters, they have, doubtless, a right to call them so; and, if they be able to make it appear so: nor ought we to consider ourselves as insulted by it. I have no idea of being offended with any man, in affairs of this kind, for speaking what he believes to be the truth. Instead of courting compliments from each other, in matters of such moment, we ought to encourage an unreservedness of expression provided it be accompanied with sobriety and benevolence. But, neither ought Socinians to complain of our refusing to acknowledge them as Christians, or to impute it to a spirit of bigotry; for it amounts to nothing more than avowing a necessary consequence of our belief. If we believe the deity and atonement of Christ to be essential to Christianity, we must, necessarily, think those who reject these doctrines, to be no Christians; nor is it inconsistent with charity to speak accordingly.

Again: what is there of bigotry, in our not allowing the Socinians to be Christians, more than in their not allowing us to be *Unitarians?* We profess to believe in the divine unity, as much as they do in Christianity. But they consider a oneness of person, as well as of essence, to be essential to the unity of God; and, therefore, cannot acknowledge us as Unitarians: and we consider the deity and atonement of Christ as essential to Christianity; and, therefore, cannot acknowledge them as Christians. *We* do not choose to call Socinians Unitarians, because that would be a virtual acknowledgment that we ourselves do not believe in the divine unity: but we are not offended at what they think of us; nor do we impute it to bigotry, or to any thing of the kind. We know, that, while they think as they do on the doctrine of the Trinity, our sentiments must appear to them as Tritheism. We comfort ourselves, in these matters, with this, that the thoughts of creatures, uninspired of God, are liable to mistake. Such are

* Familiar Letters, *Letter* VI.

theirs concerning us, and such are ours concerning them; and if Socinians do indeed *love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity*, it is happy for them. The judgment of their fellow-creatures cannot affect their state: and thousands who have scrupled to admit them among the true followers of Christ in this world, would rejoice to find themselves mistaken in that matter at the last day.

It has been pleaded, by some who are not Socinians, that a belief in the doctrine of the atonement is not necessary to salvation: they observe, That the disciples of our Lord, previously to his death, do not appear to have embraced the idea of a vicarious sacrifice; and therefore conclude that a belief in a vicarious sacrifice is not of the essence of faith. They add, It was owing to prejudice, and, consequently, wrong, for the disciples to disbelieve this doctrine; and they admit the same thing with respect to Socinians; yet, as the error in the one case did not endanger their salvation, they suppose it may not do so in the other. To this objection the following observations are offered in reply.

First: Those who object in this manner do not suppose the disciples of Christ to have agreed with Socinians in any of their peculiar sentiments, except the rejection of a *vicarious sacrifice*. They allow them to have believed in the doctrine of human depravity, divine influence, the miraculous conception, the pre-existence and proper deity of Christ, the inspiration of the scriptures, &c. The case of the disciples, therefore, is far from being parallel with that of the Socinians.

Secondly: Whatever were the ignorance and error which occupied the minds of the disciples, relative to the death of their Lord, their case will not apply to that of Socinians, on account of the difference in the state of revelation, as it stood before and after that event. Were it even allowed, that the disciples did reject the doctrine of Christ's being a vicarious sacrifice; yet the circumstances which they were under render their case very different from ours. We can perceive a very considerable difference between rejecting a principle before, and after a full discussion of it. It would be a far greater evil, in the present day, to persecute men for adhering to the dictates of their consciences, than it was before the rights of conscience were so fully understood. It may

include a thousand degrees more guilt for this country, at the present time, to persist in the slave-trade, than to have done the same thing previously to the late inquiry on that business. But the disparity between periods, with regard to the light thrown upon these subjects, is much less than between the periods before and after the death of Christ, with regard to the light thrown upon that subject. The difference between the periods before and after the death of Christ, was as great as between a period in which a prophecy is unaccomplished, and that in which it is accomplished. There are many things that seem plain in prophecy, when the event is passed, which cannot then be honestly denied: and it may seem wonderful, that they should ever have been overlooked, or mistaken; yet overlooked or mistaken they have been, and that by men of solid understanding and real piety.

It was after the death of Christ, when the means of knowledge began to diffuse light around them, that the disciples were, for the first time, reproved for their *slowness of heart to believe*, in reference to this subject. It was after the death and resurrection of Christ, when the way of salvation was fully and clearly pointed out, that those who stumbled at the doctrine of the cross were reckoned *disobedient*, in such a degree as to denominate them unbelievers, and that the most awful warnings and threatenings were pointed against them, as *treading under foot the blood of the Son of God.* It is true, our Lord had repeatedly predicted his death, and it was faulty in the disciples not to understand and believe it; yet what he taught on that subject was but little when compared with what followed. The *great salvation*, as the Apostle to the Hebrews expresses it, *first began to be spoken by the Lord*, and was *confirmed* to the primitive Christians *by those who heard him;* but then it is added, *God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will.* Now, it is upon this accumulation of evidence that he asks, *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation.**

*Heb. ii. 1—4.

A belief in the *resurrection* of Christ is allowed, on all hands, to be essential to salvation; as it is an event upon which the truth of Christianity rests.* But the disciples of Christ, previously to the event, were as much in the dark on this article, as on that of the atonement. Even to the last, when he was actually risen from the dead, they visited his tomb, in hope of finding him, and could scarcely believe their senses, with respect to his having left it; *for as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.* Now, if the resurrection of Christ, though but little understood before the event, may, after it, be considered as essential to Christianity; there is no reason to conclude, but that the same may be said of his atonement.

Thirdly: It is not clear, that the disciples did reject the idea of a vicarious sacrifice. They had, all their lives, been accustomed to vicarious sacrifices: it is, therefore, very improbable, that they should be prejudiced against the idea itself. Their objection to Christ's laying down his life, seems to have been directed simply against his *dying*, rather than against his dying as a *vicarious* sacrifice. Could they have been reconciled to the former, for any thing that appears, they would have readily acquiesced in the latter. Their objection to the death of Christ seems to have been more the effect of ignorance and misguided affection, than of a rooted opposition of principle: and therefore when they came to see clearly into the design of his death, it is expressed not as if they had essentially altered their sentiments, but *remembered the words which he had spoken to them;* of which, while their minds were beclouded with the notions of a temporal kingdom, they could form no clear or consistent ideas, and, therefore, had forgotten them.†

And, notwithstanding the ignorance and error which attended the disciples, there are things said of them which imply much more than the objection would seem to allow:—*Whither I go,* said Christ, *ye know; and the way ye know.* As if he should say, I am not going to a strange place, but to the house of my Father and of your Father; with the way to which you are acquainted,

* 1 Cor. xix. 14, 15. Rom. x. 9. † Luke xxiv. 1—8.

and therefore will soon be with me. *Thomas said unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way? Jesus said unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me.—If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.** From this passage it appears, that the disciples had a *general* idea of salvation through Christ; though they did not understand *particularly*, how it was to be accomplished. Farther: Christ taught his hearers, saying, *Except ye eat my flesh and drink my blood, ye have no life in you:—and the bread that I will give is my flesh, that I will give for the life of the world.* On this occasion, many of his nominal disciples were offended, and *walked no more with him*: but the true disciples were not offended. On the contrary, being asked, *Will ye also go away? Peter answered, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.*† From this passage it plainly appears, that the true disciples of Christ were, even at that time, considered as believing so much on the subject of Christ's giving himself for the life of the world, as to *eat his flesh and drink his blood*; for our Lord certainly did not mean to condemn them, as having *no life in them.* So far were they from *rejecting* this doctrine, that the same words at which the false disciples were offended, were to them *the words of eternal life.* Probably, this great truth was sometimes more, and sometimes less apparent to their view. At those periods in which their minds were occupied with the notion of a temporal kingdom, or in which events turned up contrary to their expectations, they would be all in darkness concerning it; yet, with all their darkness, and with all their doubts, it does not appear to be a doctrine which they can be said to have *rejected.*

No person, I think, who is open to conviction can be a bigot, whatever be his religious sentiments. Our opponents, it is true, are very ready to suppose, that this is our general character, and that we are averse from free inquiry: but this may be more than they are able to prove. We acknowledge, that we do not choose to circulate books indiscriminately among our friends,

* John xiv. 4—7. † John vi. 51—68.

which are considered by us as containing false and pernicious doctrines; neither do other people. I never knew a zealous Dissenter eager to circulate a book containing high-church principles, among his children and connexions; nor a Churchman, those which contain the true principles of dissent. In like manner, an Anti-trinitarian will not propagate the best productions of Trinitarians. If they happen to meet with a weak performance, in which the subject is treated to disadvantage, they may feel no great objection to make it public; but it is otherwise with respect to those in which it is treated to advantage. I have known some gentlemen affecting to possess what has been called a liberal mind, who have discovered no kind of concern at the indiscriminate circulation of Socinian productions; but I have also perceived, that those gentlemen have not been far from their kingdom of heaven. If any person choose to read the writings of a Socinian or of an Atheist, he is at liberty to do so; but, as the *Monthly Reviewers* themselves observe, "Though we are always ready to engage in inquiries after truth, and wish to see them at all times promoted; yet we choose to avoid disseminating notions which we cannot approve."*

As to being open to conviction *ourselves*, it has been frequently observed, that Socinians discover as great an aversion to the reading of our writings, as we can discover to the reading of theirs. Some will read them; but not many. Out of a hundred persons, whose minds lean towards the Socinian system, should you put into their hands a well-written Calvinistic performance, and desire them carefully and seriously to read it over, I question whether five would comply with your request. So far, however, as my observation extends, I can perceive in such persons an eagerness for reading those writings which suit their taste, and a contempt of others, equal, if not superior, to what is perceivable in people of other denominations.

Dr. Priestley suggests, that the importance which we give to our sentiments, tends to prevent an earnest and impartial search after truth. "While they imbibe such a notion of their present

* Monthly Review Enlarged, Vol. VI. p. 555.

sentiments, they must needs" he says, "live in the dread of all free inquiry; whereas we, who have not that idea of the importance of our present sentiments, preserve a state of mind proper for the discussion of them. If we be wrong, as our minds are under no strong bias, we are within the reach of conviction; and thus are in the way to grow wiser and better as long as we live."*

Mr. Belsham, however, appears to think the very reverse. He pleads, and I think very justly, that an idea of the non-importance of sentiment, tends to destroy a spirit of inquiry, by becalming the mind into a state of indifference and carelessness. He complains of those of his own party, (the Socinians,) who maintain that "sincerity is every thing, that nothing is of much value but an honest heart, and that speculative opinions, the cant name for those interesting doctrines, which the wise and good in every age have thought worthy of the most serious discussion,—that these speculative opinions, as they are opprobriously called, are of little use. What is this," adds he, "but to pass a severe censure upon those illustrious names, whose acute and learned labours have been successfully employed in clearing up the difficulties in which these important subjects were involved; to condemn their own conduct, in wasting so much of their time and pains upon such useless speculations; and to check the progress of religious inquiry and Christian knowledge? Were I a friend to the popular maxim—that speculative opinions are of no importance, I would endeavour to act consistently with my principles: I would content myself with believing as my fathers believed; I would take no pains to acquire or diffuse knowledge; I would laugh at every attempt to instruct and to meliorate the world; I would treat as a visionary and a fool, every one who should aim to extend the limits of science; I would recommend to my fellow-creatures that they should neither lie nor defraud, that they should neither swear falsely nor steal, should say their prayers as they have been taught: but, as to any thing else, that they need not give themselves any concern; for that honesty was every thing, and that every expectation of

*Considerations on Difference of Opinion, § II.

improving their circumstances, by cultivating their understandings and extending their views, would prove delusive and chimerical."*

None will imagine that I have quoted Mr. Belsham on account of my agreement with him in the great principles of the gospel. What he would reckon important truth, I should consider as pernicious error: and, probably, his views of the importance of what he accounts truth, are not equal to what I have attempted to maintain. But, in this general principle we are agreed: *That our conceiving of truth as being of but little importance, has a tendency to check free inquiry rather than to promote it*: which is the reverse of what we are taught by Dr. Priestley.

To illustrate the subject more fully: Suppose the possession of a precious stone, of a certain description, to entitle us to the possession of some very desirable object; and suppose that none of any other description would answer the same end; would that consideration tend to prejudice our minds in favour of *any* stone we might happen to possess; or prevent an impartial and strict inquiry into its properties? Would it not rather induce us to be more inquisitive and careful, lest we should be mistaken, and so lose the prize? If on the other hand, we could imagine, that any stone would answer the same end, or that an error in that matter were of trifling importance as to the issue, would it not have a tendency to promote a spirit of carelessness in our examinations; and, as all men are apt, in such cases, to be prejudiced in favour of what they already have, to make us rest contented with what we had in possession, be it what it might?

It is allowed, however, that, as every good has its counterfeit, and as there is a mixture of human prejudices and passions in all we think or do, there is danger of this principle degenerating into an unchristian severity; and of its being exercised at the expense of that benevolence which is due to all men. There is nothing, however, in this view of things, which, in its own nature, tends to promote these evils: for the most unfavourable opinion of a man's principles and state may consist with the most perfect benevolence

* Sermon on the Importance of truth, pp. 5, 6.

and compassion towards his person. Jesus Christ thought as ill of the principles and state of the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the generality of the Jewish nation, as any of us think of one another; yet he wept over Jerusalem, and to his last hour sought her welfare. The apostle Paul had the same conception of the principles and state of the generality of his countrymen, as Christ himself had, and much the same as we have of the Socinians. He considered them, though they *followed after the law of righteousness*, or were very devout in their way, yet as *not having attained to the law of righteousness*; in other words, as not being *righteous* persons; which the Gentiles, who submitted to the gospel, were. And *wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law? For they stumbled at that stumbling-stone.** Yet Paul, in the same chapter, and in the most solemn manner, declared, that he had *great heaviness, and continual sorrow in his heart.*—Nay, that *he could wish himself accursed from Christ, for his brethren's sake, his kinsmen according to the flesh!*

But why need I say any more? Dr. Priestley himself allows all I plead for: "The man,', says he, "whose sole spring of action is *a concern for lost souls*, and a care to preserve the purity of that gospel which alone teaches the most effectual method of their recovery from *the power of sin and Satan unto God*, will feel an ardour of mind that will prompt him strenuously to oppose all those whom he considers as obstructing his benevolent designs." He adds, "I could overlook every thing in a man who I thought meant nothing but my everlasting welfare."† This, and nothing else, is the temper of mind which I have been endeavouring to defend; and, as Dr. Priestley has here generously acknowledged its propriety it becomes us to acknowledge, on the other hand, that every species of zeal for sentiments, in which a concern for the everlasting welfare of men is wanting is an unhallowed kind of fire; for which whoever indulges it will receive no thanks from Him whose cause he may imagine himself to have espoused.

I am, &c.

* Rom. ix, 30—32.

† On Difference of Opinion, §I.

LETTER XI.

THE SYSTEMS COMPARED, AS TO THEIR INFLUENCE IN PROMOTING THE LOVE OF CHRIST.

Christian Brethren,

If the holy scriptures be a proper medium by which to judge of the nature of virtue, it must be allowed to include *the love of Christ*: nay, that love to Christ is one of the cardinal virtues of the Christian scheme; seeing it occupies a most important place in the doctrines and precepts of inspiration. *He that loveth me*, said Christ, *shall be loved of my Father.—If God were your Father, ye would love me.—Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.—Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.—If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maran-atha.**

From these passages, with many others that might be produced we may conclude, that love to Christ is not only a Christian virtue, but essential to the very existence of Christianity; nay, to *morality* itself, if by that term be meant a conformity to the moral law. The following lines, though expressed by a poet, contain more than a poetic flight, even the words of truth and soberness:

> "Talk they of Morals? Oh thou bleeding Love,
> The grand morality is love of Thee!"
>
> YOUNG.

In judging which of the systems in question is most adapted to promote love to Christ, it should seem sufficient to determine, which of them tends most to exalt his character? which places his

* John xiv. 21. viii. 42. 1 Pet. i. 8. Ephes. vi. 24. 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

mediation in the most important light ? and which represents us as most indebted to his undertaking ?

With respect to the *first* : Every being commands our affection, in proportion to the degree of intellect which he possesses ; provided that his goodness be equal to his intelligence. We feel a respect towards an animal, and a concern at its death, which we do not feel towards a vegetable ; towards those animals which are very sagacious, more than to those which are otherwise ; towards man, more than to mere animals ; and towards men of enlarged powers, if they be but good as well as great, more than to men in common. According to the degree of intellect which they possess, so much they have of being, and of estimation in the scale of being. A man is of *more value than many sparrows ;* and the life of David was reckoned to be worth ten thousand of those of the common people. It has been thought to be on this principle, that God, possessing infinitely more existence than all the creatures taken together, and being as good as he is great, is to be loved and revered without bounds, except those which arise from the limitation of our powers ; that is, *with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength.*

Now, if these obervations be just, it cannot be doubted which of the systems in question tends most to promote the love of Christ : that which supposes him to be equal, or one with God ; or that which reduces him to the rank of a mere fellow-creature. In the same proportion as God himself is to be loved above man, so is Christ to be loved, supposing him to be truly God, above what he is, or ought to be, supposing him to be merely a fellow-man.

The prophets, apostles, and primitive Christians, seem to have felt this motive in all its force. Hence in their various expressions of love to Christ, they frequently mingle acknowledgments of his divine dignity and excellence. They, indeed never seem afraid of going too far, or of honouring him too much ; but dwell upon the dignity and glory of his person, as their darling theme. When David meditated upon this subject, he was raised above himself. *My heart,* saith he, *is inditing a good matter : I speak of the things which I have made touching the King : my tongue is as the pen of a ready writer. Thou art fairer than the children of*

men.—Thy throne, O GOD, *is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre.—Gird thy sword upon thy thigh*, O MOST MIGHTY, *with thy glory and thy majesty.** The expected Messiah was frequently the subject of Isaiah's prophecies. He loved him; and his love appears to have been founded on his dignity and divine excellency. *Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor*, THE MIGHTY GOD, *the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.*† He thus describes the preaching of John the Baptist, *The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of* JEHOVAH, *make straight in the desert a high way for* OUR GOD.—*Behold, the* LORD GOD *will come with a strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.* HE *shall feed his flock like a shepherd:* HE *shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.*‡ Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, so loved the Messiah as to rejoice in his own child, chiefly because he was appointed to be his prophet and forerunner. *And thou, child*, said the enraptured parent, *shalt be called the prophet of* THE HIGHEST; *for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord, to prepare his ways.*§ John the Baptist himself, when the Jews artfully endeavoured to excite his jealousy on account of the superior ministerial success of Christ, replied, *Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled.* HE THAT COMETH FROM ABOVE IS ABOVE ALL: *he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth:* HE THAT COMETH FROM HEAVEN IS ABOVE ALL.‖

* Psa. xlv. 1—6. † Isa. ix. 6.

‡ Isa. xl. 3, 10, 11. § Luke i. 76.

‖ John iii. 28—31. Query, In what sense could Christ be said to come from above, even from heaven, if he was merely a man, and came into the world like other men? It could not be on account of his office, or of receiving his mission from God: for, in that sense, John was from heaven as well as he. Was it not for the same reason which John elsewhere gives for his being preferred before him; viz. that he was before him? John i. 15, 30.

The apostles, who saw the Lord, and who saw the accomplishment of what the prophets foretold, were not disappointed in him. Their love to him was great, and their representations of his person and character ran in the same exalted strain. *In the beginning was the Word*, said the beloved disciple, *and the Word was with God, and the Word* WAS GOD. *The same was in the beginning with God. All things* WERE MADE BY HIM, AND WITHOUT HIM WAS NOT ANY THING MADE THAT WAS MADE. *He was in the world, and* THE WORLD WAS MADE BY HIM, *and the world knew him not. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the* ONLY-BEGOTTEN OF THE FATHER,) *full of grace and truth.** Thomas insisted upon an unreasonable kind of evidence of the resurrection of his Lord from the dead; saying *Except* I *shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.*† When reproved by our Lord's offering to gratify him in his incredulous proposal, he confessed with a mixture of shame, grief and affection, that, however unbelieving he had been, he was now satisfied, that it was indeed his Lord, and no other; saying, MY LORD, AND MY GOD! The whole Epistle to the Hebrews breathes an ardent love to Christ, and is intermingled with the same kind of language. Jesus is there represented as UPHOLDING ALL THINGS BY THE WORD OF HIS POWER, as the object of ANGELIC ADORATION: as he to whom it was said, THY THRONE, O GOD, IS FOR EVER and EVER: as he who LAID THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARTH, and concerning whom it is added, THE HEAVENS ARE THE WORK OF THINE HANDS: as superior to Moses, the one being the BUILDER *and* OWNER *of the house*, even GOD *that built all things;* and the other, only a servant in it: as superior to Aaron and to all those of his order, A GREAT high priest JESUS THE SON OF GOD: and finally as infinitely superior to angels; for *to which of the angels, said he at any time*, THOU ART MY SON; or, SIT ON MY RIGHT HAND? Hence, the gospel is considered as exhibiting A GREAT *salvation;* and those who *neglect* it, are exposed to a recompense of wrath which they *shall not escape.*‡

* John i. 1—3, 14. † John xx. 24—28.

‡ Heb. i. 3, 5, 6, 8. 10, 13. iii. 3—6. iv. 14. ii. 3.

Paul could scarcely mention the name of Christ without adding some strong enconium in his praise. When he was enumerating those things which rendered his countrymen dear to him, he mentions their being *Israelites*, to whom pertained the *adoption*, and the *glory*, and the *covenants*, and the *giving of the law*, and the *service of God*, and the *promises;* whose were the *fathers*, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, *Christ came.* Here, it seems, he might have stopped: but, having mentioned the name of Christ, he could not content himself without adding, WHO IS OVER ALL GOD BLESSED FOR EVER. *Amen.** Having occasion also to speak of him, in his Epistle to the Colossians, as *God's dear Son, in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins;* he could not forbear adding, *Who is the image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature. For by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or principalities or powers; all things were created* BY *him, and* FOR *him. And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.*†

And now, brethren, I might appeal to you on the justness of Dr. Priestley's assertion, that "in no sense whatever, not even in the lowest of all, is Christ so much as called *God*, in all the New Testament."‡ I might appeal to you, whether such language as the above would ever have proceeded from the sacred writers, had they embraced the scheme of our opponents. But waving these particulars, as irrelative to the immediate point in hand, I appeal to you, whether such love as the prophets and apostles expressed towards Christ, could consist with his being merely a fellow-creature, and their considering him as such; whether the manner in which they expressed that love, upon the principles of our opponents, instead of being acceptable to God, could have been any other than the height of extravagance, and the essence of idolatry? Judge also for yourselves, brethren, which of the systems in question has the greatest tendency to promote such a spirit of love to Christ, as is here exemplified: that which leads us to admire these

* Rom. ix. 4, 5. † Col. i. 13—17.

‡ Letters to Mr. Burn, *Letter* I.

representations, and, on various occasions, to adopt the same expressions; or that which employs us in coldly criticising away their meaning: that which leads us, without fear, to give them their full scope; or that which, while we are honouring the Son, would excite apprehensions, lest we should, in so doing dishonour the Father?

The next question to be discussed is, *Which of the two systems places the mediation of Christ in the most important point of light?* That system, doubtless, which finds the greatest *use* for Christ, or in which he occupies the *most important place*, must have the greatest tendency to promote love to him. Suppose a system of politics were drawn up, in which *civil liberty* occupied but a very small portion, and was generally kept out of view; or if, when brought forward, it was either for the purpose of abating the high notions which some people entertain of it, or, at least, of treating it as a matter not absolutely necessary to good civil government; who would venture to assert, that such a system was friendly, or its abettors, friends to civil liberty? This is manifestly a case in point. The Socinian system has but little use for Christ; and none at all, as an atoning sacrifice. It scarcely ever mentions him, unless it be to depreciate those views of his dignity which others entertain, or in such a way as to set aside the absolute necessity of his mediation.

It is not so in our views of things. We find so much use for Christ, if I may so speak, that he appears as the *soul* which animates the whole body of our divinity; as the centre of the system, diffusing light and life to every part of it. Take away CHRIST; nay, take away the deity and atonement of Christ; and the whole ceremonial of the Old Testament appears to us little more than a dead mass of uninteresting matter: prophecy loses almost all that is interesting and endearing: the gospel is annihilated, or ceases to be that *good news* to lost sinners which it professes to be: practical religion is divested of its most powerful motives; the evangelical dispensation, of its peculiar glory; and heaven itself, of its most transporting joys.

The sacred penmen appear to have written all along upon the same principles. They considered CHRIST as the *All in all* of their

religion; and, as such, they loved him with their whole hearts. Do they speak of the *first tabernacle*? They call it a *figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect as pertaining to the conscience.*—But CHRIST *being come a high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.** Do they speak of prophecy? They call the testimony of Jesus the *spirit* of it.† Of the gospel? It is the doctrine of *Christ crucified.*‡ Of the medium by which the world was crucified to them, and they to the world? It is the same.§ The very *reproach of Christ* had a value stamped upon it, so as, in their esteem, to surpass all the treasures of the present world.‖ One of the most affecting ideas which they afford us of heaven, consists in ascribing everlasting glory and dominion *to him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. Ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands* were heard *with a loud voice, saying*, WORTHY IS THE LAMB THAT WAS SLAIN, TO RECEIVE POWER, AND RICHES, AND WISDOM, AND STRENGTH, AND HONOUR, AND GLORY, AND BLESSING!¶

Let us select a particular instance in the character of Paul. This apostle seemed to be swallowed up in love to Christ. His mercy to him, as one of the *chief of sinners*, had bound his heart to him with bonds of everlasting gratitude. Nor was this all; he saw that glory in his person, office and work, which eclipsed the excellence of all created objects, which crucified the world to him, and him unto the world. *What things were gain to me, those I counted lost for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things.* Nor did he now repent: for he immediately adds, *And do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him; not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the right-*

* Heb. ix. 9—11. † Rev. xix. 10. ‡ 1 Cor. i. 23. § Gal. vi. 14.
‖ Heb. xi. 26. ¶ Rev. v. 11, 12.

*eousness which is of God by faith.—That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made comformable unto his death.** When his friends wept because he would not be dissuaded from going to Jerusalem, he answered, *What mean ye to weep, and to break mine heart? For I am ready, not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem,* FOR THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS!† Feeling in himself an ardent love to Christ, he vehemently desired that others might love him too. *For this cause he bowed his knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, in behalf of the Ephesians; praying, that CHRIST *might dwell in their hearts by faith.* He represented him to them as the medium of all spiritual blessings; of *election, adoption, acceptance with God, redemption*, and *the forgiveness of sins;* of a future *inheritance*, and of a present *earnest of it*; as *Head over all things to the church*, and as *him that* FILLETH ALL IN ALL. He described him as the only way of *access to God*, and as the sole *foundation* of a sinner's hope; whose *riches were unsearchable*, and the dimensions of his love *passing knowledge.*‡

If any drew back, or deviated from the simplicity of the gospel, he felt a most ardent thirst for their recovery: witness his Epistles to the Corinthians, the Galatians, and, (if, as is generally supposed, he was the writer of it) to the Hebrews. If any one drew back, and were not to be reclaimed, he denounced against him the divine declaration, *My soul shall have no pleasure in him.*§ And, whatever might be the mind of others, like Joshua, he was at a point himself: *Henceforth*, he exclaims, *let no man trouble me; for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.*‖ If he wished to *live*, it was for Christ; or, if to *die*, it was to be with him.¶ He invoked the best of blessings on those who loved the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity; and denounced an *anathema maranatha* on those who loved him not.**

The reason why I have quoted all these passages is, to show that the primitive gospel was *full of Christ;* or, that Christ was, as it were, the centre and the life of the evangelical system; and that this, its leading and principal characteristic, tended wonder-

* Phil. iii. 7—10. † Acts xxi. 13. ‡ Ephes. i, ii, iii. § Heb. x. 38.
‖ Gal. vi. 17. ¶ Phil. i. 20. 21. ** Ephes. vi. 24. 1 Cor. xvi, 22.

fully to promote the love of Christ. Now, brethren, let me appeal to you again: Which of the systems in question is it, which resembles that of the apostles in this particular; and, consequently, has the greatest tendency to promote love to Christ? That of which Christ is the *All in all;* or that in which he is scarcely ever introduced, except for the purpose of representing him as a "mere fellow-creature, a fallible and peccable man?"

The *third,* and last question to be discussed, (if, indeed, it need any discussion,) is *Which of the two systems represents us as most indebted to Christ's undertaking?* Our Lord himself has laid it down as an incontrovertible rule, that *those who have much forgiven, will love him much; and that those who have little forgiven, will love him but little.* That system, therefore, which supposes us the greatest debtors to forgiving love, must needs have the greatest tendency to promote a return of love.

Our views with respect to *the depravity of human nature* are such, that, upon our system, we have much more to be forgiven, than our opponents have upon theirs. We suppose ourselves to have been utterly depraved; our very nature totally corrupted; and, consequently, that all our supposed virtues, while our hearts were at enmity with God, were not virtue in reality, but destitute of its very essence. We do not, therefore, conceive of ourselves, during our unregeneracy, as having been merely *stained* by a few *imperfections*; but as *altogether polluted*, by a course of apostacy from God, and black rebellion against him. That which is called sin, by our opponents, must consist chiefly, if not entirely, in the irregularity of a man's outward conduct; else they could not suppose, as Dr. Priestley does, that "Virtue bears the same proportion to vice, that happiness does to misery, or health to sickness, in the world:"* that is, that there is much more of the former than of the latter. But the merely outward irregularities of men bear no more proportion to the whole of their depravity, according to our views of it, than the particles of water which are occasionally emitted from the surface of the ocean, to the tide that rolls beneath. The religion of those who make sin to consist in

* Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever, Vol. I. *Letter* V.

little beside exterior irregularities, or who conceive of the virtues of men as greatly exceeding their vices, appears to us to resemble the religion of Paul, previously to his conversion to Christianity. While he thought of nothing but the irregularities of his exterior conduct, his virtues, doubtless appeared to him to outweigh his vices; and, therefore, he concluded all was well; that he was in a fair way to everlasting happiness; or, as he himself expresses it, *alive without the law*. But when through the glass of that divine *commandment* which prohibits the very inclination to evil, he saw the corruption that reigned within, transgression assumed a very different appearance: it was then a mighty ocean, that swelled, and swept off all his legal hopes. *Sin revived, and he died.* In short our views of human depravity induce us to consider ourselves, by nature, as *unworthy*, as *lost*, and *ready to perish*; so that, if we are saved at all, it must be by rich grace, and by a great Saviour. I scarcely need to draw the conclusion, That, having according to our system, most to be forgiven, we shall, if we truly enter into it, love most.

Further: Our system supposes a much greater malignity in sin, than that of our opponents. When we speak of sin, we do not love to deal as Mr. Belsham does, in extenuating names. We find no authority for calling it "human frailty;" or for affixing any idea to it that shall represent us rather as objects worthy of the compassion of God, than as subjects of that which his soul abhorreth. We do not see how Mr. Belsham, or those of his sentiments, while they speak of Moral evil in so diminutive a style, can possibly conceive of it, after the manner of the inspired writers, as an *evil and bitter thing*; or, as it is expressed in that remarkable phrase of the apostle Paul, *exceeding sinful.**

Our opponents deny sin to be, in any sense, an infinite evil; or, which is the same thing, deserving of endless punishment; or

* The expression, *exceeding sinful*, is very forcible. It resembles the phrase, *far more exceeding*, or rather, *excessively exceeding*, in 2 Cor. iv. 7. It seems that the Holy Spirit himself could not find a worse name for sin than its own. If we speak of a treacherous person, we call him a *Judas*: if of Judas, we call him a *devil*; but if of satan, we want a comparison, because we find none that is worse than himself: we must, therefore, say, as

that such punishment will follow upon it. Nobody, indeed supposes that sin is, *in all respects*, infinite. As committed by a finite creature, and admitting of different degree, it must be finite, and will doubtless be punished hereafter with different degrees of punishment ; but, as committed against a God of infinite excellence, and as tending to infinite anarchy and mischief, it must be infinite. All that is meant, I suppose, by calling sin an infinite evil, is, that it is deserving of endless punishment ; and this can never be fairly objected to, as an absurdity. If there be no absurdity in the immortality of a sinner's existence, there is none in supposing him to deserve a punishment, be it in what degree it may, they shall run commensurate with it. There is no absurdity in supposing a sinner to have been guilty of such crimes as to deserve misery for as long a duration as he is capable of sustaining it. But whatever may be said as to the truth or falsehood of this sentiment, thus much is clear : that, in proportion as our opponents conceive diminutively of the evil of sin, they diminish the grace of forgiveness ; and if that forgiveness come to us through Christ, (as is plainly implied in their loving *him* most who have most forgiven,) it must needs follow, that in the same proportion, the love of Christ is sapped at the foundation.

Once more : The *expense* at which we suppose our forgiveness to have been obtained, is a consideration which endears to us both the gift and the giver. We do not conceive of Christ, in his bestowment of this blessing upon us, as presenting us with that which costs him nothing. If the portion given by Jacob to his son Joseph was heightened and endeared by its being obtained *by the sword and the bow* ; much more is a title to eternal life, by its being obtained through the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is this that attracts the hearts of those who are described as singing a new song to their redeemer, *Thou wast slain, and hast*

Christ did, *When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own.* It was thus with the Apostle, when speaking of the evil of his own heart, *That sin by the commandment* might become—what ? He wanted a name worse than his own—he could not find one—he therefore unites a strong epithet to the thing itself, calling it *exceeding sinful.*

redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred and tongue, and people, and nation.

It does not appear, from any thing I have seen, that the system of our opponents can, with any plausibility, be pretended to equal ours, respecting love to Christ. All that can be alleged, with any colour of reason; all, however, that I have noticed, is this; That, in proportion as we, in this way, furnish motives of love to Christ, we detract from those of love to the Father, by diminishing the freeness of his grace, and exhibiting him as one that was incapable of bestowing forgiveness, unless a price was paid for it. To this it is replied: If the incapacity of the Father to show mercy without an atonement, consisted in a want of love, or any thing of natural implacability, or even a reluctance to the bestowment of mercy, there would be force in the objection: but, if it be no other than the incapacity of a righteous governor, who, whatever goodwill he may have to an offender, cannot bear the thought of passing by the offence without some public expression of displeasure against it; that, while mercy triumphs, it may not be at the expense of law, of equity, and of the general good; such an incapacity rather infers a perfection, than an imperfection, in his nature; and, instead of diminishing our regard for his character, must have a powerful tendency to increase it.

I am, &c.

LETTER XII.

ON VENERATION FOR THE SCRIPTURES.

Christian Brethren,

If we may judge of the nature of true piety by the examples of the prophets and holy men of old, we may conclude, with certainty, that an affectionate attachment to the holy scriptures, as the rule of faith and practice, enters deeply into the spirit of it. The holy scriptures were desribed, by David, under the names of the *word*, *statutes*, *laws*, *precepts*, *judgments*, and *testimonies* of God ; and to these, all through the Psalms, especially in the 119th, he professes a most ardent attachment. Such language as the following was very common with him, as well as others of the Old-testament writers ; *O how I love thy law!—Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.—Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wonderous things out of thy law.—My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times.–Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart.—Thy statutes have been my song in the house of my pilgrimage.—The law of thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver.*

Dr. Priestley often professes great regard for the sacred writings, and is very severe on Mr. Burn, for suggesting, that he denied "the infallibility of the apostolic testimony concerning the person of Christ." He also tells Dr. Price, "No man can pay a higher regard to *proper* scripture authority than I do." We may therefore take it for granted, that a regard for the authority of scripture is a virtue; a virtue that our opponents, as well as we, would be thought to possess.

I wish, in this Letter, to inquire, supposing the sacred writers to have been honest and good men, What a regard to the *proper* authority of their writings includes, and to compare it with the avowed sentiments of our adversaries. By those means, brethren, you may be the better able to judge for yourselves, whether

the spirit which animates the whole body of the Socinian divinity does not breathe a language unfriendly to the sacred writings, and carry in it something hostile to *every thought being subdued to the obedience of Christ.*

In order to judge of a regard for proper scriptural authority, it is necessary, in the first place, to have recourse to the *professions* of the sacred writers concerning what they wrote. If any man venerate the authority of scripture, he must receive it as BEING WHAT IT PROFESSES TO BE, AND FOR ALL THE PURPOSES FOR WHICH IT PROFESSES TO BE WRITTEN. If the scriptures profess to be divinely inspired, and assume to be the infallible standard of faith and practice; we must either receive them as such, or, if we would be consistent, disown the writers, as impostors.

The professions of the sacred writers are as follow: *The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue: the God of Israel said, the rock of Israel spake to me.—Thus saith the Lord. —And Jehoshaphat stood, and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.**

New-testament writers bear ample testimony to the inspiration of those under the Old Testament. *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God; and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.—No prophecy of the scripture is of private interpretation*—it is not to be considered as the private opinion of a fallible man, as the case is with other productions—*for the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*†

Nor did the New-testament writers bear testimony to the inspiration of the prophets only; but considered their *own writings* as equally inspired: *If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.* Peter ranks the Epistles of

* 2 Sam. xxiii. 2, 3. Isa. xlii. 1. 2 Chron. xx. 20.

† 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17. 2 Peter i. 20, 21.

Paul with *other scriptures.** There seems to have been one instance in which Paul disowned his having received any *commandment from the Lord,* and in which he proceeded to give his own private *judgment:*† but this appears to have been a particular exception from a general rule, of which notice was expressly given; an exception, therefore, which tends to strengthen, rather than to weaken the argument for apostolic inspiration.

As the sacred writers considered themselves as divinely inspired, so they represented their writings as the infallible test of divine truth, to which all appeals were to be made, and by which every controversy in religious matters was to be decided. *To the law, and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.—These are the true sayings of God. That which is noted in the scriptures of truth.—What saith the scripture?—Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me.*—The Bereans *searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*‡

The sacred writers did not spare to denounce the most awful judgments against those who should either pervert their writings, add to them, or detract from them. Those who wrested the apostolic Epistles, are said to have *wrested them, as they did the other scriptures, to their own destruction.—Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let them be accursed.—What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.—If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life.*§ Nothing short of the most perfect divine inspiration could justify such language as this, or secure those who used it from the charge of bold presumption and base imposition.

* 1 Cor. xiv. 37. 2 Pet. iii. 16. † 1 Cor. vii. 25.

‡ Isa. viii. 20. Rev. xix. 9. Dan. x. 21. Rom. iv. 3. John, v. 39. Acts, xvii. 11.

§ 2 Pet. iii. 16. Gal. i. 8. Deut. xii. 32. Rev. xxii. 18, 19.

Dr. Priestley often professes great regard for the scriptures, and, as has been observed before, is very severe on Mr. Burn for representing him as denying "the infallibility of the apostolic testimony concerning the person of Christ. Far be it from me to wish to represent the sentiments of Dr. Priestley in an unfair manner or in such a light as he himself could justly disavow. All I mean to do, is to quote a passage or two from his own writings, and add a few remarks upon them.

Speaking in favour of reverence for the sacred writings, he says, "Not that I consider the books of scripture as *inspired*, and, on that account, entitled to this high degree of respect, but as authentic records of the dispensations of God to mankind, with every particular of which we cannot be too well acquainted."

Again; "If you wish to know what, in my opinion, a Christian is bound to believe with respect to the *scriptures*, I answer, that the books which are universally received as *authentic*, are to be considered as faithful records of past transactions, and, especially, the account of the intercourse which the Divine Being has kept up with mankind from the beginning of the world, to the time of our Saviour and his apostles. No Christian is answerable for more than this. The writers of the books of scripture were *men*, and therefore *fallible;* but all that we have to do with them is in the character of *historians* and *witnesses* of what they heard and saw. Of course, their credibility is to be estimated, like that of other historians; viz. from the circumstances in which they wrote, as with respect to their opportunities of knowing the truth of what they relate, and the biases to which they might be subject. Like all other historians, they were liable to mistakes with respect to things of small moment, because they might not give sufficient attention to them; and with respect to their *reasoning*, we are fully at liberty to judge of it, as well as that of any other men, by a due consideration of the propositions they advance, and the arguments they allege. For it by no means follows, because a man has had communications with the Deity for certain purposes, and he may be depended upon with respect to his account of those communi-

cations, that he is in other respects, more wise and knowing than other men."*

"You say," says he, in his *Letters to Dr. Price*, "that I do not allow of scriptural authority: but, indeed, my friend, you should have expressed yourself with more caution. No man can pay a higher regard to proper scriptural authority, than I do; but neither I, nor, I presume, yourself, believe implicitly every thing that is advanced by any writer in the Old or New Testament. I believe all the writers, without exception, to have been men of the greatest probity, and to have been well informed of every thing of consequence, of which they treat; but, at the same time I believe them to have been *men*, and consequently *fallible*, and liable to mistake with respect to things to which they had not given much attention, or concerning which they had not the means of exact information; which I take to be the case with respect to the account that Moses has given of the creation and the fall of man." In a late performance, entitled, *Letters to the Philosophers and Politicians of France*,† Dr. Priestley speaks much in the same strain. "That the books of scripture" he says, "were written by a particular divine inspiration, is a thing to which the writers themselves make no pretensions. It is a notion destitute of all proof, and that has done great injury to the evidence of Christianity."

From this account, taken all together, you will observe, brethren, that Dr. Priestley does not believe either the Old or the New Testament to be *divinely inspired;* to be so inspired as that he is "bound implicitly to believe every thing" (and might he not have added *any thing ?*) "which the writers of those books advance." He believes, that the scriptures, instead of being *the rule of faith and practice*, are only "faithful records of past transactions:" and that no authority attends them, except what attends the writings of any other honest and well-informed historian; nor even that, in many cases: for he maintains, that "no Christian is bound to consider any of the books of scripture as faithful records of past transactions, unless they have been *universally* received as

* Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever, *Part* II. Preface, p. xiii. also *Letter* V.

† Page 38.

authentic :" that is, if any person, at least any considerable number of persons, at any period, have thought proper to dispute the authenticity of any of these writings, that part immediately ceases to have any claim upon posterity, and may be rejected with impunity. And even those writers, whose works, upon the whole, are allowed as authentic, are supposed to have written upon subjects "to which they had not given much attention, and concerning which they were not possessed of sufficient means of information;" and, consequently, in those cases, are not to be regarded. This is the whole of what he means by "*proper* scriptural authority." This is the ground on which,while he speaks of the sacred writers as *fallible,* he nevertheless, maintains the infallibility of their testimony concerning the person of Christ. He does not pretend to say the apostles were inspired in that article, though not in others, but merely that this was a case in which, by the mere exercise of their senses, they were competent to decide, and even certain of deciding right. Whether these notions of *proper* scriptural authority will accord with the foregoing *professions*, I leave you to judge ; also, if Dr. Priestley's views be right, whether the sacred writers, professing what they did, could be men of the "greatest probity."

You will observe further, that the fallibility which Dr. Prietley imputes to the sacred writers, as being *men*, must rest upon this principle ; That it is impossible for God himself so to inspire a *man* as to preserve him from error, without destroying his nature; and, as he considers Christ as a mere *man*, perhaps it is on this principle that he maintains him to be "fallible and peccable." Yet he has never been able to produce one example in which he has actually failed. But, it should seem very extraordinary, for a fallible and peccable man to go through the world in such a manner, that his worst enemies could not convict him of a single failure, nor accuse him of any sin. If this matter be capable of proof, let Dr. Priestley prove it. Though the Jews declined the

challenge, yet, it is possible that he may possess sufficient "magnanimity" to accept it.*

Further: You will observe, that the *infallibility* which Dr. Priestley ascribes to the apostolic testimony concerning the person of Christ, implies, that every historian is infallible in similar circumstances. His reasoning supposes, that, if a sensible and upright historian have the proper means of information, and pay attention to his subject, he is infallible: but is this a fact? It certainly has not been usual for us to consider historians in this light. We commonly suppose, that, amidst the most ample means of information, and the greatest attention, that uninspired men (who all have their prejudices and imperfections) are ever known to pay to a subject, they are liable to mistakes. Dr. Priestley has written a treatise, in which he has declared for the doctrine of *Materialism;* and, I suppose, he would be thought to have paid attention to it, and to have possessed the means of information as far as the nature of the subject will admit; yet, I imagine, he does not pretend, in that article, to infallibility.

If it be objected, that the nature of the subjects is different, and that the apostles were capable of arriving to a greater degree of certainty concerning the person of Christ, than Dr. Priestley could obtain on the subject of Materialism; I answer, This appears, to me, to be more easily asserted than proved. Dr. Priestley, indeed, tells us, "They were as capable of judging whether he was a *man*, as whether John the Baptist was one." This is very true; and if the question were, *Whether he was a man;* it might be to the purpose. But at this time of day, however some of the humble followers of Dr. Priestley may amuse themselves in circulating pamphlets, proving that Jesus Christ was a man, and that with a view to convert the Trinitarians; yet he himself cannot be insensible, that a Materialist might, with just as much propriety, gravely go about to prove that men have material bodies.† Sup-

* When Dr. Priestley charges the Mosaic history of the creation and fall of man, with being a *lame account*, it was imputed to his *magnanimity*.

† When Socinian writers have produced a list of texts, which prove the proper humanity of Christ, they seem to think their work is done. Our wri-

posing Christ to have been merely a man, this was a matter that could not be visible to the eyes of the apostles. How could they judge by his exterior appearance, whether he was merely a man, or both God and man ? The august personages that appeared to Abraham, to Lot, and to Jacob, are called *men ;* nor was there any thing, that we know of, in their exterior appearance, different from other men : yet, it does not follow from hence, that they were merely human. God, in the above instances, assumed the appearance of a man ; and how could the disciples be certain that all this might not be preparatory to his becoming really incarnate ? It is true, our Lord might have told them that he was merely a man ; and, in that case, they might have been said to be certain of it : but, if so, it was either in some private instructions, or else in the words which they have recorded in their writings. We cannot say it was impossible for the apostles to mistake respecting the person of Christ, owing to their private instructions : because that would be building upon a foundation, of which we are confessedly ignorant : neither can we affirm it on account of any of those words of Christ to his disciples which are *recorded* : for we have those words as well as they ; and it might as well be said of us, as of them, that " it is impossible for us to be under any mistake upon the subject." We might as well, therefore, allow what Dr. Priestley says to be infallible, on the question, whether men have souls, or not, as what the apostles say (if we give up their inspiration) on the question, whether Christ was divine, or not : for the one is as much an object of the senses, as the other.

I cannot conceive of any foundation for the above assertion, unless it be upon the supposition of a union of the divine and human natures being, *in itself, impossible*. Then, indeed, if we suppose the apostles knew it to be so, by knowing him to be a *man*,

ters reply ; We never questioned his humanity. If you attempt to prove any thing, prove to us, that he was *merely* human. Here our opponents, feeling themselves pinched, it should seem, for want of evidence, have been known to lose their temper. It is on this occasion, that Mr. Lindsey is reduced to the necessity of *abusing* and *insulting* his opponents, instead of answering their arguments. *Catechist*, Inquiry VI. quoted towards the latter end of Letter VIII.

they must have known him to be a *mere* man. But, if a union of the divine and human natures be in itself impossible, that impossibility might as well appear to Dr. Priestley as to the apostles, if they were uninspired; and he might as well maintain the infallibility of his own notions, relative to the person of Christ, as of theirs.

In fine: Let Dr. Priestley view the subject in what light he may, if he deny the divine inspiration of the apostles, he will never be able to maintain their infallibility, on any ground but what would equally infer his own.

When Mr. Burn charged Dr. Priestley with denying the infallibility of the apostolic testimony, he principally founds his charge on what the Doctor had written in a miscellaneous work called, *The Theological Repository:* in which he maintained, that "some texts of the Old Testament had been improperly quoted by writers in the New;" who, it seems, were some times "misled by Jewish prejudices."* Mr. Burn inferred, that if they were misled in their application of one text, they were *liable* to the same thing in others; and that, if so, we could have no security whatever for their proper application of any passage, or for any thing like *infallibility* attending their testimony. One would think, this is not the most inconclusive mode of reckoning that ever was adopted: and how does Dr. Priestley refute it? He replies, "It does not follow, because I suppose the apostles to have been fallible in *some* things, that they were therefore, fallible in all." He contends, that he always considered them as infallible, *in what respects the person of Christ;* as a proof of which he alleges his always having "appealed to their testimony, as being willing to be decided by it." And yet we generally suppose, a single failure proves a writer fallible, as really as a thousand; and, as to his appealing to their testimony, and being willing to be decided by it, we generally appeal to the best evidence we can obtain, and must be decided by it. But this does not prove, that we consider that evidence as *infallible.* Dr. Priestley has appealed to the *Fathers;* yet he will hardly pretend that their testimony is infallible; or, that they were incapable of contradicting either themselves, or

* Letters to Mr. Burn, *Letters* I. II.

one another, even in those matters concerning which the appeal is made. If he will, however, he must suppose them to have differed very widely from writers of a later date. Where is the historian who has written upon the opinions of characters of a body of men, even of those of his own times, but who is liable, and likely, in some particulars, to be contradicted by other historians of the same period, and equally respectable ?*

To be sure, if Dr. Priestley thinks proper to declare, that he believes the apostles, uninspired as they were, to have been infallible when they applied passages of the Old Testament *to the person of Christ;* and that, notwithstanding their being fallible, and misled by Jewish prejudices in their application of passages on other subjects, nobody has a right to say he does not. Thus much may be said, however, that he will find it no very easy task, to prove himself, in this manner, a *Rational Christian.* If the apostles are to be considered as uninspired, and were actually misled by Jewish prejudices in their application of some Old Testament passages, it will require no small degree of labour to convince people in general, that we can have any security for their not being so in others.

Mr. Burn, with a view to illustrate his argument, supposed an example; viz. the application of Psalm xlv. 6. to Christ, in Heb. i. 8. He observes that, according to the foregoing hypothesis, "there is no dependence to be placed upon the argument; because the Apostle, in his application of this scripture to the Messiah, *was misled by a prejudice common among the Jews, respecting this, and other passages in the Old Testament.* Mr. Burn does not mean to say that Dr. Priestley *had, in this manner, actually rejected the argument from* Heb. i. 8. but barely, that, according to his hypothesis, *he might do so:* he preserves the principle of his opponent's objection, as he himself expresses it; but does not mean to assert that he had applied that principle to this particular passage. And how does Dr. Priestley reply to this? Why, by alleging that he *had not* applied the above principle to the passage in question, but had given it a sense, which allowed the propriety of

* See this truth more fully illustrated in a *Letter of Dr. Edward Williams Dr. Priestley* prefixed to his *Abridgment of Dr. Owen on the Hebrews.*

its being applied to Christ: that is, he had not made that use of a principle which might be made of it, and which no one asserted he had made of it. Dr. Priestley is, doubtless, possessed of great abilities, and has had large experience in controversial writing: to what a situation then, must he have been reduced, to have recourse to such an answer as the above!

The question between Mr. Burn and Dr. Priestley, if I understand it, is not, Whether the latter appealed to the scriptures for the truth of his opinions; but, Whether his supposing the sacred writers, in some cases, to apply scripture improperly, does not render that appeal inconsistent? not, Whether he had allowed the propriety of the Apostle's quoting the sixth verse of the forty-fifth Psalm, and applying it, in the first chapter of the Hebrews, to Christ: but, Whether, upon the principle of the sacred writers being liable to make, and having actually made, some improper quotations, he *might not* have disallowed it? not, Whether the Apostles did actually fail in this or that particular subject; but, Whether, if they failed in some instances, they were not *liable* to fail in others; and, whether any dependence could be placed on their decisions? not, Whether the Apostles testified *things which they had seen and heard from the beginning;* but, Whether the *infallibility* can be supported merely upon that ground, without supposing that the Holy Spirit assisted their memories, guided their judgments, and superintended their productions? If the reader of that controversy keep the above points in view, he will easily perceive the futility of a great many of Dr. Priestley's answers, notwithstanding all his positivity and triumph, and his proceeding to admonish Mr. Burn to repentance.

Dr. Priestley, in his *Sixth Letter* to Mr. Burn, denies, that he makes *the reason of the individual the sole umpire in matters of faith.* But, if the sacred writers, "in some things which they advanced were fallible, and misled by prejudice;" what dependence can be placed upon them? Whether the reason of the individual be a proper umpire in matters of faith, or not, the writings of the Apostles, on the foregoing hypothesis, can make no such pretence. Dr. Priestley may allege, that we must distinguish between those things to which the Apostles had not given much at-

tention, and other things to which they had; those in which they were prejudiced, and others in which they were unprejudiced; those concerning which they had not the means of exact information, and others of a different description: but can he himself, at this distance of time, or even if he had been cotemporary with them, always tell what those cases are? How, in many instances at least, can he judge, with any certainty, of the degree of attention which they gave to things; of the prejudiced or unprejudiced state of their minds; or, of the means of information which they possessed? Or, if *he* could decide with satisfaction to himself on these matters, how are the bulk of mankind to judge, who are not possessed of his powers and opportunities, but who are equally interested in the affair with himself? Are they implicitly to rely on his opinion; or, to supplicate heaven for a new revelation, to point out the defects and errors of the old one? In short: let Dr. Priestley profess what regard he may for the scriptures, if what he advances be true, *they* can be no proper test of truth; and if the reason of the individual be not the sole umpire in these matters, there can be no umpire at all; but all must be left in gloomy doubt, and dreadful uncertainty.*

The generality of Socinian writers, as well as Dr. Priestley, write degradingly of our only rule of faith. The scriptures profess to be *profitable for* DOCTRINE, *and to be able to make men wise unto salvation. The testimony of the Lord is* said to be *sure: making wise the simple;* and those who made it their study, professed to have obtained *more understanding than all their teachers.* But Mr. Lindsey considers the scriptures as unadapted to promote any high perfection in knowledge, and supposes, that they are left in obscurity, with design to promote an occasion of charity, candour, and forbearance. Speaking of the doctrine of the person of Christ, "Surely it must be owned," he says, "to have been left in some obscurity in the scriptures themselves, which might mislead readers, full of Heathen prejudices, (otherwise so many men, wise

* The reader will observe, that the foregoing remarks on the controversy between Mr. Burn and Dr. Priestley, have nothing to do with that part of it which relates to the riots at Birmingham, but merely with that on *the person of Christ.*

and good, would not have differed, and still continue to differ, concerning it;) and so left, it should seem, on purpose to whet human industry, and the spirit of inquiry into the things of God, to give scope for the exercise of men's charity, and mutual forbearance of one another, and to be one great means of cultivating the moral dispositions; which is plainly the design of the Holy Spirit of God in the Christian revelation, and not any high perfection in knowledge, which so few can attain."*

On this extraordinary passage, one might inquire, First, If the scriptures have left the subject in obscurity, why might not the mistake of those who hold the divinity of Christ, (supposing them to be mistaken,) have been accounted for, without alleging, as Mr. Lindsey elsewhere does, that "they are determined, at all events, to believe Christ to be a different being from what he really was; that there is no reasoning with them; and that they are to be pitied, and considered as being under a debility of mind, in this respect, however sensible and rational in others."† If wise and good men have differed upon the subject in all ages, and that owing to the obscurity with which it is enveloped in the scriptures themselves, why this abusive and insulting language? Is it any disgrace to a person not to see that clearly in the scriptures, which is not clearly there to be seen?

Secondly: If the scriptures have indeed left the subject in obscurity, how came Mr. Lindsey to be so decided upon it? The "high perfection of knowledge" which he possesses, must, undoubtedly, have been acquired from some *other quarter;* seeing it made no part of the design of the Holy Spirit in the Christian revelation. But, if so, we have no further dispute with him; as, in what respects religion, we do not aspire to be *wise above what is written.*

Thirdly: Let it be considered, whether the principle on which Mr. Lindsey encourages the exercise of charity and mutual forbearance, do not cast a heavy reflection upon the character of God. The scriptures, in what relates to the person of Christ, (a subject on which Dr. Priestley allows the writer to have been *infallible,*)

* Apology, Chap. II. † Catechist, Inquiry VI.

are left obscure; so obscure, as to mislead readers full of Heathen prejudices; nay, and with the very design of misleading them. God himself, it seems, designed that they should stumble on in ignorance, error, and disagreement, till, at last, wearied with their fate, and finding themselves united in one common calamity, they might become friends. But what is this friendship? Is it not at the expense of him who is supposed to have spread their way with snares, or (which is the same thing) with misleading obscurity? Is it any other than the *friendship of the world, which is enmity with God?*

In perfect harmony with Mr. Lindsey is the language of a writer in the *Monthly Review*. "The nature and design of the scripture," he says, "is not to settle disputed theories, nor to decide upon speculative, controverted questions, even in *religion and morality*. The scriptures, if we understand any thing of them, are intended not so much to make us wiser, as to make us better; not to solve the doubts, but, rather, to make us obey the dictates of our consciences."* The holy scriptures were never designed, then, to be a *rule* of faith or practice; but merely a *stimulative*. In matters of speculation, (as all disputed subjects will be termed, whether doctrinal or practical,) they have no authority, it seems, to decide any question. *What saith the scripture?* therefore, would now be an impertinent question. You are to find out what is truth, and what is righteousness, by your reason and your conscience; and when you have obtained a system of religion and morality to your mind, scripture is to furnish you with motives to reduce it to practice. If this be true, to what purpose are all appeals to the scriptures on controverted subjects; and why do Socinians pretend to appeal to them? Why do they not honestly acknowledge, that they did not learn their religion from thence, and therefore refuse to have it tried at that bar? This would save much labour. To what purpose do they object to particular passages, as *interpolations*, or *mis-translations*, or the like; when the whole, be it ever so pure, has nothing at all to do in the decision of our controversies? We have been used to speak of con-

* Review of Horsley's Sermon, March, 1793.

science having but *one master, even Christ:* but now, it seems, conscience is its own master, and Jesus Christ does not pretend to dictate to it, but merely to assist in the execution of its decisions!

Mr. *Belsham* carries the matter still further. This gentleman, not satisfied, it seems, with disclaiming an implicit confidence in holy scripture, pretends to find *authority, in the scriptures themselves, for so doing.* "The Bereans," he says, "are commended for not taking the word even of an apostle, but examining the scriptures for themselves, whether the doctrines which they heard were true, and whether St. Paul's reasoning was just."* I do not recollect, that the Bereans were commended *for not taking the word of an apostle;* but for not rejecting it without examination, as the Jews did at Thessalonica. But, granting it were otherwise, their situation was different from ours. They had not then had an opportunity of obtaining evidence that the apostles were divinely inspired, or that the gospel which they preached was a message from God. This, surely, is a circumstance of importance. There is a great difference between their entertaining some doubt of the truth of the gospel, till they had fully examined its evidences; and our still continuing to doubt of its particular doctrines and reasonings, even though we allow it to be a message from God. To this may be added, that, in order to obtain evidence, the Bereans *searched the scriptures.* By comparing the facts which Paul testified, with the prophecies which went before; and the doctrines which he preached, with those of the Old Testament; they would judge, whether his message was from God, or not. There is a great difference b etween the criterion of the Bereans and that of the Socinians. The scriptures of the Old Testament were the allowed standard of the former; and they employed their reason to find out their meaning, and their agreement with New-testament facts: but the authority and agreement of the Old and New Testaments will not satisfy the latter, unless what they contain agree also with their pre-conceived notions of what is fit and reasonable. The one tried what, for aught they at that time knew, were mere private reasonings, by the scriptures; but the other try the scrip-

* Sermon on the Importance of Truth, p. 39.

tures by their own private reasonings. Finally: If proposing a doctrine for examination prove the proposer liable to false or unjust reasoning, it will follow, that the reasoning of Christ might be false or unjust; seeing he appealed to the scriptures, as well as his apostles, and commanded his hearers to *search* them. It will also follow, that all the great *facts* of Christianity, as well as the reasonings of Christ and his apostles, were liable to be detected of falsehood; for these were as constantly submitted to examination, as the other. *These things*, said they, *were not done in a corner*. Nay, it must follow, that God himself is liable to be in a wrong cause, seeing he frequently appeals to men's judgments and consciences. *And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard.* The inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, were exhorted, and even entreated, it may be said, not to take matters upon trust; but to examine for themselves, whether the conduct of Jehovah was just, or whether any thing ought to have been done for his vineyard, that was not done!

But, far as our English Socinians have gone in these things, they do not seem to have exceeded, nor hardly to have equalled, those of the same denomination, in other countries. These appear to have made great advances indeed, towards Infidelity. Mr. *Blackwall* makes mention of two, whose language conveys an idea of uncommon disrespect to the sacred writings. *George Engedin*, speaking of the writing of John, says "If a concise, abrubt obscurity, inconsistent with itself, and made up of allegories, is to be called sublimity of speech, I own John to be sublime: for there is scarce one discourse of Christ, which is not altogether allegorical, and very hard to be understood." *Gagneius*, another writer of the same spirit, says, "I shall not a little glory, if I shall be found to give some light to Paul's darkness; a darkness, as some think, industriously affected."—"Let any of the followers of these worthy interpreters of the gospel, and champions of Christianity," adds Mr. Blackwall, by way of reflection, "speak worse, if they can, of the ambiguous oracles of the father of lies. These fair-dealing gentlemen first disguise the sacred writer, and turn them into a harsh allegory;—and then charge them with that obscurity

and inconsistency which is plainly consequent upon that sense which their interpretations force upon them. They outrage the divine writers in a double capacity: first, they debase their sense as theologues and commentators, and then carp at, and vilify their language as grammarians and critics."*

Steinbart, *Semler*, and other foreign Socinians, of latter times, write in a similar strain. The *former*, speaking of the narrations of facts contained in the New Testament, says, " These narrations, true, or false, are only suited for ignorant, uncultivated minds, who cannot enter into the evidence of natural religion." The same writer adds, " Moses, according to the childish conceptions of the Jews in his days, paints God as agitated by violent affections, partial to one people, and hating all other nations." The *latter*, in a Note on 2 Pet. i. 21. *The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*, says, " Peter speaks there according to the conception of the Jews ;" and, " the prophets may have delivered the offspring of their own brains, as divine revelations."†

Socinian writers sometimes profess great respect to the holy scriptures : and most, if not all of them, would have it thought, that they consider their testimony as being in their favour. But, if so, why all these pains to depreciate them ? We know who they are that not only undermine their general credit, but are obliged, on almost every occasion, to have recourse to *interpolation*, or *mis-translation ;* who are driven to disown the apostolic *reasonings* as a proper test of religious sentiment, and to hold them as the mere private opinions of men, no way decisive as to what is truth. But, is it usual, in any cause, for persons to endeavour to set aside those witnesses, and to invalidate that testimony, which they consider at the same time, as being in their favour ? This is a question which it does not require much critical skill to decide.

When Socinian writers have mangled and altered the traslation to their own minds, informing us, that such a term *may* be rendered so, and such a passage should be pointed so, and so on ; they

* Sacred Classics, *Part* II. Chap. V.

† Dr. Erskine's Sketches and Hints of Church History, No. III. pp. 95, 71

seem to expect that their opponents, should quote the scriptures accordingly ; and, if they do not, are very liberal in insinuating, that their design is to impose upon the vulgar. But, though it be admitted, that every translation must needs have its imperfections, and that those imperfections ought to be corrected by fair and impartial criticism : yet, where alterations are made, by those who have an end to answer by them, they ought always to be suspected, and will be so, by thinking and impartial people.

If we must quote particular passages of scripture, after the manner in which our adversaries translate them, we must also avoid quoting all those which they object to as interpolations. Nor shall we stop here : we must, on certain occasions, leave out whole chapters, if not whole books. We must never refer to the *reasonings* of the apostles, but consider that they were subject to be misled by Jewish prejudices ; nor even to *historical facts*, unless we can satisfy ourselves that the historians, independent of their being divinely inspired, were possessed of sufficient means of information. In short, if we must never quote scripture, except according to the rules imposed upon us by Socinian writers, we must not quote it at all : not, at least, till they shall have indulged us with a bible of their own, that shall leave out every thing on which we are to place no dependence. A publication of this sort would, doubtless, be an acceptable present to the Christian world ; would be comprised in a *very small compass ;* and be of infinite service in cutting short a great deal of unnecessary controversy, into which, for want of such a criterion, we shall always be in danger of wandering.

Dr. Priestley, in his *Animadversions on Mr. Gibbon's History*, takes notice of what is *implied* in that gentleman's endeavouring to lessen the number and validity of the early martyrdoms; namely, a consciousness that they afforded an argument against him. " Mr. Gibbon," says the Doctor, " appears to have been sufficiently sensible of the value of such a testimony to the truth of the gospel history, as is furnished by the early martyrdoms, and, therefore, he takes great pains to diminish their number ; and, when the facts cannot be denied, he endeavours to exhibit them in

the most unfavourable light."* Judge, brethren, whether this picture does not bear too near a resemblance to the conduct of Dr. Priestley, and other Socinian writers, respecting the holy scriptures.

I have heard of persons, who, when engaging in a law-suit, and fearing lest certain individuals should appear in evidence against them, have so contrived matters as to *sue the witnesses;* and so, by making them parties in the contest, have disqualified them for bearing testimony. And what else is the conduct of Dr. Priestley, with respect to those passages in the New Testament, which speak of Christ as GOD? We read there, that *The Word, who was made flesh, and dwelt among us,* WAS GOD. Thomas exclaimed, *My Lord and my* GOD.—*Of whom as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all,* GOD *blessed for ever.—Unto the Son he saith, thy throne, O* GOD, *is for ever and ever.—Feed the church of* GOD, *which he hath purchased with his own blood.—Hereby perceive we the love of* GOD, *because he laid down his life for us.*† But Dr. Priestley asserts, that "in no sense whatever, not even in the lowest of all, is Christ so much as called *God* in all the New Testament."‡ The method taken by this writer to enable him to hazard such an assertion, without being subject to the charge of downright falsehood, could be no other than that of laying a kind of *arrest* upon the foregoing passages, with others, as being either interpolations, or mis-translations, or something that shall answer the same end; and, by these means, imposing silence upon them, as to the subject in dispute. To be sure, we may go on, killing one scripture testimony, and stoning another, till, at length, it would become an easy thing to assert, that there is not an instance, in all the New Testament, in which our opinions are confronted. But to what does it all amount? When we are told, that "Christ is never so much as called *God,* in all the New Testament;" the question is, Whether

* Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever, *Part* II, p. 217.

† John i. 1. 14. xx. 28. Rom. ix. 5. Heb. 1. 8. Acts xx. 28. 1 John iii. 16.

‡ Letters to Mr. Burn, *Letter* I.

we are to understand it of the New Testament, as it was left by the sacred writers; or, as corrected, amended, curtailed, and interpreted, by a set of controvertists, with a view to make it accord with a favourite system?

I am, &c.

LETTER XIII.

ON THE TENDENCY OF THE DIFFERENT SYSTEMS, TO PROMOTE HAPPINESS, OR CHEERFULNESS OF MIND.

Christian Brethren,

Nothing is more common with our opponents, than to represent the Calvinistic system as gloomy ; as leading to melancholy and misery. Our ideas of God, of sin, and of future punishment, they say, must necessarily depress our minds. Dr. Priestley, as we have seen already, reckons Unitarians "more cheerful" than Trinitarians. Nor is this all. It has even been asserted, that the tendency of our principles is to promote "moral turpitude, melancholy, and despair ; and that the suicide practised among the middling and lower ranks, is frequently to be traced to this doctrine."* This is certainly carrying matters to a great height. It might be worth while, however, for those who advance such things as these, to make good what they affirm, if they be able. Till that be done, candour itself must consider these bold assertions as the mere effusions of malignity and slander.

It is some consolation, however, that what is objected to us, by Socinians, is objected to *religion itself*, by unbelievers. Lord *Shaftsbury* observes, "There is a melancholy which accompanies all enthusiasm," which, from his pen is only another name for Christianity. To the same purpose, Mr. *Hume* asserts, "There is a gloom and melancholy remarkable in all devout people." If these writers had formed a comparison between Deists and Atheists, on the one side, and devout Christians, on the other, they would have said of the former, as Dr. Priestley said of Unitarians, "They are more cheerful and more happy."

* See Critical Review, for Sept. 1787, on Memoirs of Gabriel d'Anville.

It is granted, that the system we adopt has nothing in it adapted to promote the happiness of those who persist in enmity against God, and in a rejection of our Lord Jesus Christ, as the only way of salvation. While men are at war with God, we do not know of any evangelical promise that is calculated to make them happy.—This, perhaps, with some, may be a considerable ground of objection to our views of things: but then, such objection must stand equally against the scriptures themselves; since their language to ungodly men is, *Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep.* All the prophets and ministers of the word were, in effect, commanded to *say to the wicked*, IT SHALL BE ILL WITH HIM. This, with us, is one considerable objection against the doctrine of *the final salvation of all men;* a doctrine much circulated of late, and generally embraced by Socinian writers. Supposing it were a truth, it must be of such a kind as is adapted to comfort mankind *in sin.*—It is good news; but it is to the impenitent and unbelieving, even to those who live and die such; which is a characteristic so singular, that I question whether any thing can be found in the Bible to resemble it. If our views of things be but adapted to encourage sinners to return to God by Jesus Christ; if they afford strong consolation to those who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them; and if sobriety, righteousness and godliness here meet with the most powerful motives, this is all that the scriptures themselves propose.

Our system, it is granted, is not adapted to promote that kind of cheerfulness and happiness to which men in general are greatly addicted; namely, that which consists in *self-deceit*, and *levity of spirit.* There is a kind of cheerfulness, like that of a tradesman who avoids looking into his accounts, lest they should disturb his peace, and render him unhappy. This, indeed, is the cheerfulness of a great part of mankind; who shun the light, lest it should disturb their repose, and interrupt their present pursuits. They try to persuade themselves that *they* shall have peace, though they add drunkenness to thirst; and there are not wanting preachers who afford them assistance in the dangerous delusion. The doctrines of human depravity, of sinners being under the curse of the law, and of their exposedness to everlasting punishment, are

those which are supposed to lead us to melancholy: and we may fairly conclude, that the *opposites* to these doctrines are at the bottom of the cheerfulness of which our opponents boast. Instead o considering mankind as lost sinners, exposed to everlasting destruction, they love to represent them simply as creatures, as the children of God, and to suppose that, having, in general, more virtue than vice, they have nothing to fear; or if, in a few instances, it be otherwise, still, they have no reason to be afraid of *endless* punishment. These things, to be sure, make people cheerful; but it is with the cheerfulness of a wicked man. It is just as wicked men would have it. It is no wonder, that persons of "no religion, and who lean to a life of dissipation, should be the first to embrace these principles." They are such as must needs suit them; especially, if we add what Dr. Priestley inculcates, in his Sermon on the death of Mr. Robinson, *That it is not necessary to dwell in our thoughts upon death and futurity; lest it should interrupt the business of life, and cause us to live in perpetual bondage.** We hope it is no disparagement of the Calvinistic doctrine, that it disclaims the promoting of all such cheerfulness as this. That cheerfulness which is damped by thoughts of death and futurity, is, at best, mere natural joy. It has no virtue in it; nay, in many cases it is positively vicious, and founded in self-deception. It is nothing better than *the laughter of a fool.* It may blaze awhile in the bosoms of the dissipated, and the secure; but, if the sinner be once awakened to just reflection, it will expire *like the crackling of thorns under a pot.*

There is, also, a kind of happiness, which some persons enjoy, in treating the most serious and important subjects with *levity;* making them the subjects of jest, and trying their skill in disputing upon them; which is frequently called pleasantry, good nature, and the like. A cheerfulness of this kind, in Oliver Cromwell, is praised by Mr. Lindsey, and represented as an excellency "of which the gloomy bigot is utterly incapable."† Pleasantry, on some occasions, and to a certain degree, is natural and allowable: but, if sporting with sacred things must go by that name, let me be called a "gloomy bigot," rather than indulge it.

* This is the substance of what he advances, pp. 7—12. † Apology, Chap. II.

Once more; It is allowed, that the system we embrace has a tendency, on various occasions, to promote *sorrow of heart*. Our notions of the evil of sin exceed those of our opponents. While they reject the doctrine of atonement by the cross of Christ, they have not that glass, in which to discern its malignity, which others have. There are times in which we remember Calvary, and weep on account of that for which our Redeemer died. But, so far are we from considering this as our infelicity, that, for weeping in this manner once, we could wish to do so a thousand times. There is a pleasure in the very pains of godly sorrow, of which the light minded speculatist is utterly incapable. The tears of her that wept, and washed her Saviour's feet, afforded abundantly greater satisfaction than the unfeeling calm of the Pharisee, who stood by, making his ill-natured reflections upon her conduct.

If our views of things have no tendency to promote solid, holy, heavenly joy; joy that fits true Christians for the proper business of this world, and the blessedness of that which is to come; we will acknowledge it a strong presumption against them. If, on the other hand, they can be proved to possess such a tendency, and that in a much greater degree than the opposite scheme, it will be a considerable argument in their favour. Let us examine this matter a little closer.

The utmost happiness which the peculiar principles of Socinians are adapted to promote, consists in *calmness of mind*, like that of a philosopher contemplating the works of creation. The friends of that scheme conceive of man as a good kind of being, and suppose there is a greater proportion of virtue in the world than vice; and that things, upon the whole, are getting better still, and so tending to happiness. They suppose there is little or no breach between God and men; nothing but what may be made up by repentance, a repentance without much pain of mind,* and without any atoning Saviour; that God, being the benevolent Father of his rational offspring, will not be strict to mark iniquity; and that, as his benevolence is infinite, all will be well at last: *As with the good, so with the sinner; with him that sweareth, as with*

* Such a repentance is pleaded for, by Mr. Jardine in his Letters to Mr. Bogue.

him that feareth an oath. This makes them serene, and enables them to pursue the studies of philosophy, or the avocations of life with composure. This appears to be the summit of their happiness; and must be so of all others, if they wish to escape their censure. For, if any one pretends to happiness of a superior kind, they will instantly reproach him as an enthusiast. A writer in the Monthly Review observes, concerning the late President Edwards, "From the account given of him, he appears to have been a very reputable, good, and pious man, according to his *views and feelings* in religious matters, which those of different sentiments and cooler sensations will not fail to consider as all wild *ecstacy, rapture, and enthusiasm.*"*

The tendency of any system to promote *calmness*, is nothing at all in its favour, any further than such calmness can be proved to be virtuous. But this must be determined by the situation in which we stand. We ought to be affected according to our situation. If, indeed, there be no breach between God and men; if all be right, on our part as well as his, and just as it should be; then it becomes us to be calm and thankful: but, if it be otherwise it becomes us to feel accordingly. If we have offended God, we ought to bewail our transgressions, and be sorry for our sin; and, if the offence be great, we ought to be deeply affected with it. It would be thought very improper for a convict, a little before the time appointed for his execution, instead of cherishing proper reflections on the magnitude of his offence, and suing for the mercy of his offended sovereign, to be employed in speculating upon his benevolence, till he has really worked himself into a persuasion that no serious apprehensions were to be entertained, either concerning himself, or any of his fellow-convicts. Such a person might enjoy a much greater degree of *calmness* than his companions; but considerate people would neither admire his mode of thinking, nor envy his imaginary felicity.

Calmness and serenity of mind *may* arise from ignorance of ourselves, and from the want of a principle of true religion. While Paul was ignorant of his true character, he was calm and easy,

* Review of Edwards' History of Redemption, Vol. LXXX. Art. 68.

or, as he expresses it, *alive without the law;* but *when the commandment came,* in its spirituality and authority, *sin revived and he died.* The Pharisee, who was *whole* in his own esteem and needed no physician, was abundantly more calm than the publican, who smote upon his breast, and cried, *God be merciful to me a sinner!* While any man is destitute of a principle of true religion, the strong man armed keepeth the house, and the goods are in peace, and while things are thus, he will be a stranger to all those holy mournings, which abound in the Psalms of David, and to those inward conflicts between *flesh and spirit* described in the writings of Paul. And, knowing nothing of such things himself, he will be apt to think meanly of those who do; to deride them as enthusiasts; and to boast of his own insensibility, under the names of calmness and cheerfulness.

Supposing the calmness and cheerfulness of mind, of which our opponents boast, to be on the side of virtue; still, it is a cold and insipid kind of happiness, compared with that which is produced by the doctrine of salvation through the atoning blood of Christ. One great source of happiness is *contrast.* Dr. Priestley has proved, what, indeed, is evident from universal experience, "That the recollection of past troubles, after a certain interval, becomes highly pleasurable, and is a pleasure of a very durable kind."* On this principle he undertakes to prove the infinite benevolence of the Deity, even in his so ordering things, that a mixture of pain and sorrow shall fall to the lot of man. On the same principle may be proved, if I mistake not, the superiority of the Calvinistic system to that of the Socinians, in point of promoting happiness. The doctrines of the former, supposing them to be true, are *affecting.* It is affecting to think, that man, originally pure, should have fallen from the height of righteousness and honour, to the depth of apostacy and infamy; that he is now an enemy to God, and actually lies under his awful and just displeasure, exposed to everlasting misery; that, notwithstanding all this, a ransom is found, to deliver him from going down to the pit; that God so loved the world, as to give his only-begotten Son, to be-

* Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever, *Part* I. Letter VI.

come a sacrifice for sin, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life; that the issue of Christ's death is not left at an uncertainty, nor the invitations of his gospel subject to universal rejection, but an effectual provision is made in the great plan of redemption, that he shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied; that the Holy Spirit is given to renew and sanctify a people for himself; that they who were under condemnation and wrath, being justified by faith in the righteousness of Jesus, have peace with God; that aliens and outcasts are become the sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty; that everlasting arms are now beneath them, and everlasting glory is before them. These sentiments, I say, supposing them to be true, are, undoubtedly, *affecting*. The Socinian system, supposing it were true, compared with this, is cold, uninteresting, and insipid.

We read of *joy and peace in believing*; of *joy unspeakable, and full of glory*. Those who adopt the Calvinistic doctrine of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and of their own lost condition as sinners, are prepared to imbibe the joy of the gospel, supposing it to exhibit a great salvation, through the atonement of a great Saviour, to which others, of opposite sentiments, must of necessity be strangers. The Pharisees, who thought well of their character and condition, like the elder son in the parable, instead of rejoicing at the good news of salvation to the chief of sinners, were disgusted at it; and this will ever be the case with all who, like the Pharisees, are *whole* in their own eyes, so whole as to think they need no physician.

The votaries of the Socinian scheme do not, in general, appear to feel their hearts much interested by it. *Voltaire* could say in his time, "At least, hitherto, only a very small number of those called Unitarians, have held any religious meetings."* And, though Dr. Priestley, by his great zeal, has endeavoured to invigorate and reform the party; yet he admits the justice of a common complaint among them, that "their societies do not flourish, their members have but a slight attachment to them, and easily desert them; though it is never imagined," he adds, "that they desert

* Additions to General History, Art. England, under Charles II.

their principles."* All this the Doctor accounts for by allowing, that their principles are not of that importance which we suppose ours to be; and, that "many of those who judge so truly concerning the particular tenets of religion, have attained to that cool, unbiassed temper of mind, in consequence of becoming more indifferent to religion in general, and to all the modes and doctrines of it." Through *indifference*, it seems, they come in; through *indifference* they go out; and are very *indifferent* while there. Yet, it is said, they still retain their principles; and, I suppose, are very cheerful, and very happy. Happiness, theirs, consequently, which does not interest the heart, any more than reform the life.

Although the aforementioned writer in the *Monthly Review* insinuates, that *President Edwards'* religious feelings were "all wild ecstacy, rapture, and enthusiasm;" yet he adds, "We cannot question the sincerity of Mr. Edwards, who, however he may possibly have imposed on himself by the warmth of his imagination, was, perhaps, rather to be envied than derided, for his ardours and ecstasies, which, in themselves, were, at least, innocent; in which he, no doubt, found much delight, and from which no creature could receive the least hurt." I thank you, sir, for this concession. It will, at least, serve to show, that the sentiments and feelings which you deem wild and enthusiastical, may, by your own acknowledgment, be the most adapted to promote human happiness; and that is all for which I, at present contend. President Edwards, however, was far from being a person of that warm imagination which this writer would insinuate. No man could be a greater enemy to real enthusiasm. Under the most virulent oppositions, and the heaviest trials, he possessed a great share of coolness of judgment, as well as of calmness and serenity of mind; as great, and, perhaps, greater, than any one whom this gentleman can refer us to, among those whom he calls men of *cool sensations*. But he felt deeply in religion; and, in such feelings, our adversaries themselves being judges, he was to be "envied, and not derided."

* Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 94.

Why should religion be the only subject in which we must not be allowed to *feel?* Men are praised for the exercise of ardor, and even of ecstacy in poetry, in politics, and in the endearing connexions of social life; but, in religion, we must either go on with cool indifference, or be branded as enthusiasts. Is it because religion is of less importance than other things? Is eternal salvation of less consequence than the political or domestic accommodations of time? It is treated by multitudes as if it were; and the spirit of Socinianism, so far as it operates, tends to keep them in countenance. Is it not a pity but those who call themselves *Rational Christians*, would act more rationally? Nothing can be more irrational, as well as injurious, than to encourage an ardor of mind after the trifles of a moment, and to discourage it when pursuing objects of infinite magnitude.

"Passion is reason, transport temper, here!"

The Socinian system proposes to exclude *mystery* from religion, or "things in their own nature incomprehensible."* But such a scheme not only renders religion the only thing in nature void of mystery, but divests it of a property essential to the continued communication of happiness to an immortal creature. Our passions are more affected by objects which surpass our comprehension, than by those which we fully know. It is thus with respect to *unhappiness*. An unknown misery is much more dreadful than one that is fully known. Suspense adds to distress. If, with regard to transient sufferings, we know the worst, the worst is commonly over; and hence our troubles are frequently greater when feared, than when actually felt. It is the same with respect to *happiness*. That happiness which is felt in the pursuit of science, abates in the full possession of the object. When once a matter is fully known, we cease to take that pleasure in it as at first, and long for something new. It is the same in all other kinds of happiness. The mind loves to swim in deep waters: if it touch the bottom, it feels disgust. If the best were once fully known, the best would thence be over. Some of the noblest passions in

* Defence of Unitarianism, for 1786, p. 67.

Paul were excited by objects incomprehensible: *O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!—Great is the mystery of Godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, believed on in the world, received up into glory!* Now, if things be so, it is easy to see, that, to divest religion of every thing incomprehensible, is to divest it of what is essential to human happiness. And no wonder: for it is nothing less than to divest it of GOD!

The Socinian scheme, by rejecting the deity and atonement of Christ, rejects the very essence of that which both supports and transports a Christian's heart. It was acknowledged by Mr. Hume, that, "The *good*, the *great*, the *sublime*, and the *ravishing*, were to be found evidently in the principles of Theism." To this, Dr. Priestley very justly replies; "If so, I need not say, that there must be something *mean*, *abject* and *debasing*, in the principles of Atheism."* But let it be considered, whether this observation be not equally applicable to the subject in hand. Our opponents it is true, may hold sentiments which are great and transporting. Such are their views of the works of God in creation: but so are those of Deists. Neither are these the sentiments in which they differ from us. Is the Socinian system, *as distinguished from ours*, adapted to raise and transport the heart? This is the question.—Let us select only one topic, for an example. Has any thing, or can any thing be written, on the scheme of our adversaries, upon *the death of Christ*, equal to the following lines?

"Religion! thou the soul of happiness;
And groaning *Calvary* of thee! *there* shine
The noblest truths; *there* strongest motives sting!
There sacred violence assaults the soul.—
My theme! my inspiration! and my crown!
My strength in age! my rise in low estate!
My soul's ambition, pleasure, wealth!—my world!
My light in darkness! and my life in death!
My boast through time! bliss through eternity!

* Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever, *Part* I. Preface, p. x.

Eternity too short to speak thy praise!
Or fathom thy profound of love to man!
To man, to men the meanest, ev'n to me;
My sacrifice! my God! what things are these!"

Again:

"Pardon for infinite offence! and pardon,
Through means that speak its value infinite!
A pardon bought with blood! with blood divine!
With blood divine of him I made my foe!
Persisted to provoke! though woo'd and awed,
Bless'd, and chastis'd, a flagrant rebel still!
A rebel 'midst the thunders of his throne!
Nor I alone, a rebel universe!
My species up in arms! not one exempt!
Yet for the foulest of the foul he dies!——
Bound every heart! and every bosom burn!
Oh what a scale of miracles is here!
Praise! flow for ever, (if astonishment
Will give thee leave,) my praise! for ever flow:
Praise ardent, cordial, constant to high Heaven
More fragrant than Arabia sacrific'd;
And all her spicy mountains in a flame!"

Night Thoughts, Night. IV.

There is a rich, great and ravishing quality in the foregoing sentiments, which no other theme can inspire. Had the writer been a Socinian and attempted to write upon the death of Christ, he might, by the strengh of his mind and the fire of his genius, have contributed a little to raise his subject; but here his subject raises him above himself.

The dignity of Christ, together with his glorious undertaking, was, as we have seen, in Letter XI. a source of joy and love to the primitive Christians, it was their darling theme, and that which raised them above themselves. Now, according to our system, Christians may still rejoice in the same manner, and give vent to their souls, and to all that is within them; and without fear of going beyond the words of truth and soberness, of bordering, or seeming to border, upon idolatry. But, upon the principles of our opponents, the sacred writers must have dealt largely

in hyperbole; and it must be our business, instead of entering into their spirit, to sit down with "cool sensations," criticise their words, and explain away their apparent meaning.

Brethren, I appeal to your own hearts, as men who have been brought to consider yourselves as the scriptures represent you; Is there any thing, in that preaching which leaves out the doctrine of salvation by an atoning sacrifice, that can afford you any relief? Is it not like the priest and Levite, who passed by on the other side? Is not the doctrine of atonement by the blood of Christ like the oil and wine of the good Samaritan? Under all the pressures of life, whether from inward conflicts or outward troubles, is not this your grand support? What but *an advocate with the Father* one *who is the propitiation for our sins*, could prevent you, when you have sinned against God, from sinking into despondency, and encourage you to sue afresh for mercy? What else could so divest affliction of its bitterness, death of its sting, or the grave of its gloomy aspect? In fine: what else could enable you to contemplate a future judgment with composure? What hope could you entertain of being justified, at that day, upon any other footing than this, *It is Christ that died?*

I am aware I shall be told that this is appealing to the passions, and to the passions of enthusiasts. To which it may be replied, In a question which relates to happiness, the *heart* is the best criterion: and, if it be enthusiam to think and feel concerning ourselves as the scriptures represent us, and concerning Christ as he is there exhibited, let me live and die an enthusiast. So far from being ashamed to appeal to such characters, in my opinion they are the only competent judges. Men of mere speculation play with doctrines: It is the plain and serious Christian that knows most of their real tendency. In a question therefore, which concerns their happy or unhappy influence, his judgment is of the greatest importance.

Dr. Priestley allows, that "the doctrine of a general, and a most particular providence, is so leading a feature in every scheme of predestination, it brings God so much into every thing, that an habitual and animated devotion is the result."* This witness is

* Doctrine of Necessity, p. 162.

true : nor is this all. The same principle, taken in its connexion with various others, equally provides for a serene and joyful satisfaction in all the events of time. All the vicissitudes of nations ; all the furious oppositions to the church of Christ ; all the efforts to overturn the doctrine of the cross, or blot out the spirit of Christianity from the earth, we consider as permitted for wise and holy ends. And, being satified that they make a part of God's eternal plan, we are not inordinately anxious about them. We can assure our opponents, that when we hear them boast of their increasing numbers, as, also, professed unbelievers, of theirs, it gives us no other pain than that which arises from good will to men. We have no doubt, that these things are wisely permitted ; that they are a fan in the hand of Christ, by which he will thoroughly purge his floor ; and that the true gospel of Christ like the sun in the heavens, will finally disperse all these interposing clouds. We are persuaded, as well as they, that hings, upon the whole, whether we, in our contracted spheres of observation, perceive it, or not, are tending to the general good : that the empire of truth and righteousness, notwithstanding all the infidelity and iniquity that are in the world, is upon the increase ; that it must increase more and more ; that glorious things are yet to be accomplished in the church of God ; and that all which we have hitherto seen, or heard, of the gospel dispensation, is but as the first-fruits of an abundant harvest.

The tendency of a system to promote present happiness, may be estimated by a degree of *security* which accompanies it. The obedience and suffering of Christ, according to the Calvinistic system, constitute the ground of our acceptance with God. *A good moral life*, on the other hand, is the only foundation on which our opponents profess to build their hopes.* Now, supposing our principles should prove erroneous, while they do not lead us to neglect good works, but do abound in them, from love to God, and with a regard to his glory ; it may be presumed, that the Divine Being will not cast us off to eternity, for having ascribed too much to him, and too little to ourselves. But, if the principles

* See the quotations from Dr. Priestley, Dr. Harwood, and Mrs. Barbauld, *Letter* IX.

of our opponents should be found erroneous, and the foundation on which they build their hopes should, at last, give way, the issue must be fatal! I never knew a person in his dying moments, alarmed for the consequence of having assumed too little to himself, or for having ascribed too much to Christ: but many, in that hour of serious reflection, have been more than a little apprehensive of danger from the contrary.

After all, it is allowed, that there is a considerable number of persons amongst us, who are under too great a degree of mental dejection; but, though the number of such persons, taken in the aggregate, be considerable, yet there are not enough of them to render it any thing like a *general* case. And as to those who are so, they are, almost all of them, such, either from constitution, from the want of a mature judgment to distinguish just causes of sorrow, or from a sinful neglect of their duties and their advantages. Those who enter most deeply into our views of things, provided their conduct be consistent, and there be no particular propensity to gloominess in their constitution, are among the happiest people in the world.

I am, &c.

LETTER XIV.

A COMPARISON OF MOTIVES, EXHIBITED BY THE TWO SYSTEMS, TO GRATITUDE, OBEDIENCE, AND HEAVENLY MINDEDNESS.

Christian Brethren,

THE subject of this Letter has been occasionally noticed already: but there are a few things in reserve that require your attention. As men are allowed, on both sides, to be influenced by *motives*, whichever of the systems it is that excels in this particular, that of course, must be the system which has the greatest tendency to promote a holy life.

One very important motive, with which the scriptures acquaint us, is THE LOVE OF GOD MANIFESTED IN THE GIFT OF HIS SON. *God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins.—God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all.—Behold, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.** The benevolence of God to men is represented, in the New Testament, as consisting, not in his overlooking their frailties, not so much even in his forgiving their sins, as in giving his only-begotten Son to die for them. *Herein was love;* and herein was found the grand motive to grateful obedience. There is no necessity, indeed, for establishing this point, since Dr. Priestley has fully acknowledged it. He allows, that "the love of God in giving his Son to die for us, is the consideration on which the scriptures always lay the greatest stress, as a motive to gratitude

* John iii. 16. 1 John iv. 10, 11. Rom. v. 8. and viii. 32.

and obedience."* As this is a matter of fact, then, allowed on both sides, it may be worth while to make some inquiry into the reason of it; or, *why* it is that so great a stress should be laid, in the scriptures, upon this motive. To say nothing of the strong presumption which this acknowledgment affords in favour of the doctrine of atonement, suffice it, at present, to observe, that in all other cases, an obligation to gratitude is supposed to bear some proportion to the magnitude, or *value*, of the gift. But if it be allowed in this instance, it will follow, that the system which gives us the most exalted views of the dignity of Christ, must include the strongest motives to obedience and gratitude.

If there be any meaning in the words, the phraseology of John iii 16, *God so loved the world, that he gave* HIS ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON, conveys an idea of the highest worth in the object bestowed. So great was this gift, that the love of God in the bestowment of it, is considered as *inexpressible* and *inestimable*. We are not told *how much* he loved the world, but that he SO loved it that he gave HIS ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON. If Jesus Christ be of more worth than the *world* for which he was given, then was the language of the sacred writer fit and proper; and then was the gift of him truly great, and worthy of being made "the consideration upon which the scriptures should lay the greatest stress, as a motive to gratitude and obedience." But, if he be *merely a man* like ourselves, and was given only to instruct us by his doctrine and example, there is nothing so *great* in the gift of him, nothing that will justify the language of the sacred writers from the apperance of bombast; nothing that should render it a motive to gratitude and obedience, upon which the *greatest stress* should be laid.

Dr. Priestley, in his *Letters to Dr. Price*, observes, that, "In passing from Trinitarianism to High Arianism, from this to your Low Arianism, and from this to Socinianism, even of the lowest kind, in which Christ is considered as a mere man, the son of Joseph and Mary, and naturally as fallible and peccable as Moses, or any other prophet, there are sufficient sources of gratitude and devotion. I myself," continues Dr. Priestley, "have gone through all those changes; and I think I may assure you, that you have nothing to apprehend

* Defence of Unitarianism, for 1786, p. 102.

from any part of the progress. In every stage of it, you have that consideration on which the scriptures always lay the greatest stress, as a motive to gratitude and obedience; namely, the love of God, the Almighty Parent, in giving his Son to die for us. And whether this Son be man, angel, or of a super-angelic nature, every thing that he has done is to be referred to the *love of God*, the original Author of all, and to him all our gratitude and obedience is ultimately due."*

Dr. Priestley, it seems, wishes to have it thought, that, seeing Trinitarians, Arians, and Socinians agree, in considering the gift of Christ as an expression of the love of God; therefore their different systems are upon a level, as to the grand method of gratitude and obedience. As if it made no difference at all, whether that gift was small or great; whether it was a man or an angel, or one whom men and angels are bound to adore: whether it was to die, as other martyrs did, to set us an example of perseverance; or, by laying down his life as an atoning sacrifice, to deliver us from the wrath to come. He might as well suppose the gift of one talent to be equal to that of ten thousand, and that it would induce an equal return of gratitude; or, that the gift of Moses, or any other prophet, afforded an equal motive to love and obedience, as the gift of Christ.

If, in every stage of religious principle, whether Trinitarian, Arian, or Socinian, by admitting that one general principle, *The love of God in giving his Son to die for us*, we have the same motive to gratitude and obedience, and that in the same degree; it must be because the greatness or smallness of the gift, is a matter of no consideration, and has no tendency to render a motive stronger or weaker. But this is not only repugnant to the plainest dictates of reason, as hath been already observed, but also to the doctrine of Christ. According to this, *He that hath much forgiven, loveth much; and he that hath little forgiven, loveth little.* From hence, it appears, that the system which affords the most extensive views of the evil of sin, the depth of human apostacy, and the magnitude of

* Defence of Unitarianism, for 1786, pp. 101, 102.

redemption, will induce us to love the most, or produce in us the greatest degree of gratitude and obedience.

It is to no purpose to say, as Dr. Priestley does, "Every thing that Christ hath done, is to be referred to *the love of God.*" For, be it so, the question is, if his system be true, *What hath he done;* and what is there to be referred to the love of God? To say the most, it can be but little. If Dr. Priestley be right, the breach between God and man is not so great, but that our repentance and obedience are of themselves, without any atonement whatever, sufficient to heal it. Christ, therefore, could have but *little to do.* But the less he had to do, the less we are indebted to him, and to God for the gift of him: and, in proportion as this is believed, we must of course, feel less gratitude, and devotedness of soul to God.

Another important motive with which the scriptures acquaint us is, THE LOVE OF CHRIST IN COMING INTO THE WORLD, AND LAYING DOWN HIS LIFE FOR US. *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus; who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.—For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be made rich.—Forasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil.—Verily, he took not on him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham.—The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again.—Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering, and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour.—To him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.* Such is the uniform language of the New Testament, concerning the love of Christ; and such are the moral purposes to which it is applied. It is a presumption in favour of our system,

that here the above motives have all their force: whereas, in the system of our opponents, they have scarcely any force at all. The following observations may render this sufficiently evident.

We consider the coming of Christ into the world, as a *voluntary undertaking*. His taking upon him, or *taking hold*, not of the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham; his *taking upon him* the form of a servant, and being made in the likeness of men, and that from a state of *mind*, which is held up for our example; and his becoming *poor*, though *previously rich*, for our sakes, and that as an act of grace; all concur to establish this idea. For this we feel our hearts bound, by every consideration that love unparalleled can inspire, to gratitude and obedience. But our opponents, by supposing Christ to have been a mere man, and to have had no existence till he was born of Mary, are necessarily driven to deny, that his coming into the world was a voluntary act of his own; and consequently, that there was any love or *grace* in it. Dr. Priestley, in answer to Dr. Price, contends only that "he came into the world in obedience to the command of the Father, and not in consequence of his own proposal." But the idea of his coming, in obedience to the command of the Father, is as inconsistent with the Socinian scheme, as his coming in consequence of his own proposal. For, if he had no existence previous to his being born of Mary, he could do neither the one nor the other. It would be perfect absurdity, to speak of our coming into the world as an act of obedience: and, on the hypothesis of Dr. Priestley, to speak of the coming of Christ under such an idea, must be equally absurd.*

We consider Christ's coming into the world, as an act of *condescending love;* such, indeed, as admits of no parallel. The *riches* of deity, and the *poverty* of humanity; the *form of God*, and *the form of a servant*, afford a contrast that fills our souls with grateful astonishment. Dr. Priestley, in the last mentioned performance,† acknowledges, that "the Trinitarian doctrine of the incarnation, is calculated forcibly to impress the mind with divine condescension." He allows the doctrine of the incarnation, as held by the Arians, to have such a tendency in a degree: but he tells Dr. Price, who pleaded this argument against Socinianism, that "the

* Defence of Unitarianism, for 1786, p. 103. † Page 103.

Trinitarian hypothesis of the Supreme God becoming man, and then suffering and dying for us, would, no doubt, impress the mind more forcibly still." This is one allowed source of gratitude and obedience, then, to which the scheme of our adversaries makes no pretence, and for which it can supply nothing adequate. But Dr. Priestley thinks to cut up at one stroke, it seems, all the advantages which his opponents might hope to gain from these concessions, by adding; "With what unspeakable reverence and devotion do the Catholics eat their maker!" That a kind of superstitious devotion may be promoted by falsehood, is admitted: such was the *voluntary humility* of those who worshiped angels. But, as those characters, with all their pretended humility, were vainly *puffed up with a fleshly mind;* so all that appearance of reverence and devotion which is the offspring of superstition, will be found to be something at a great remove from piety or devotedness to God. The superstitions of Popery, instead of promoting reverence and devotion, have been thought, by blinding the mind, and encumbering it with other things, to destroy them.* There are times, in which Dr. Priestley himself "cannot conceive of any practical use being made of transubstantiation:"† but not now it is put on a level with a doctrine which, it is allowed, "tends forcibly to impress the mind with divine condescension."

Once more: We believe that Christ, in laying down his life for us, actually *died as our substitute;* endured the curse of the divine law, that we might escape it; was delivered for our offences, that we might be delivered from the wrath to come; and all this, while we were yet enemies. This is a consideration of the greatest weight: and, if we have any justice or ingenuousness about us, love like this must constrain us to live, not to ourselves, but to him that died for us, and rose again! But, according to our adversaries, Christ died *for us* in no higher sense than a common martyr, who might have sacrificed his life to maintain his doctrine; and, by so doing, have set an example for the good of oth-

* See Mr. Robinson's Sermon, on 2 Cor. iv. 4 entitled, The Christian Doctrine of Ceremonies.

† Defence of Unitarianism, for 1786, p. 33.

ers. If this be all, why should not we be as much indebted, in point of gratitude, to Stephen, or Paul, or Peter, who also in that manner died for us, as to Jesus Christ? And why is there not the same reason for their death being proposed as a motive for us to live to them, as for his, that we might live to him?

But there is another motive, which Dr. Priestley represents as being "that in Christianity which is most favourable to virtue; namely, a future state of retribution, grounded on the firm belief of the historical facts recorded in the scriptures; especially in the miracles, the death, and the resurrection of Christ. The man," he adds, "who believes these things only, and who, together with this, acknowledges a universal providence, ordering all events; who is persuaded that our very hearts are constantly open to the divine inspection, so that no iniquity, or purpose of it, can escape his observation, will not be a bad man, or a dangerous member of society."* Dr. Priestley, elsewhere, as we have seen, acknowledges, that "the love of God, in giving his Son to die for us, is *the consideration on which the scriptures always lay the greatest stress* as a motive to gratitude and obedience;" and yet he speaks here, of "a future state of retribution, as being that in Christianity which is *most favourable to virtue.*" One should think, that what the scriptures always lay the greatest stress upon, should be that in Christianity which is most favourable to virtue, be it what it may. But, waving this, let it be considered, whether the Calvinistic system has not the advantage, even upon this ground. The doctrine of a future state of retribution, is a ground possessed by Calvinists, as well as by Socinians; and, perhaps, it may be found, that their views of that subject, and others connected with it, are more favourable to virtue, and a holy life, than those of their adversaries.

A motive of no small importance, by which we profess to be influenced, is, *The thought of our own approaching dissolution.* Brethren, if you embrace what is called the Calvinistic view of things, you consider it as your duty and interest to be frequently conversing with mortality. You find such thoughts have a ten-

* Letters to Mr. Burn, Letter V.

dency to moderate your attachments to the present world; to preserve you from being inordinately elated by its smiles, or dejected by its frowns. The consideration of the *time being short*, teaches you to hold all things with a loose hand; to weep, as though you wept not, and to rejoice, as though you rejoiced not. You reckon it a mark of true wisdom, to keep the end of your lives habitually in view; and to follow the advice of the holy scriptures, where you are directed to *go to the house of mourning, rather than to the house of feasting;* where the godly are described as praying, *So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom;* and God himself, as saying, *O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!** But these things, instead of being recommended and urged as motives of piety, are discouraged by Dr. Priestley; who teaches, that *it is not necessary to dwell in our thoughts upon death and futurity, lest it should interrupt the business of life, and cause us to live in perpetual bondage.*†

The scriptures greatly recommend the virtue of *heavenly mindedness*. They teach Christians to consider themselves as strangers and pilgrims on the earth; to be dead to the world, and to consider their life, or portion, as hid with Christ in God. The spiritual, holy, and happy state, which, according to the Calvinistic system, commences at death, and is augmented at the resurrection, tends, more than a little, to promote this virtue. If, brethren, you adopt these views of things, you consider the body as a tabernacle, a temporary habitation; and when this tabernacle is dissolved by death, you expect a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Hence it is, that you desire to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord. There are seasons in which your views are expanded, and your hearts enlarged. At those seasons, especially, the world loses its charms, and you see nothing worth living for, except to serve and glorify God. You have, in a degree, the same feeling which the Apostle Paul appears to have possessed, when he said, *I am in a strait betwixt two, hav-*

* Eccles. vii. 2. Psalm xc. 12. Deut. xxxii. 29.

† Sermon on the Death of Mr. Robinson, pp. 7, 22.

ing a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better. For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But Dr. Priestley teaches, that the heavenly state shall not commence till the resurrection. He does not suppose that there is any state of existence, strictly speaking, wherein we shall be absent from the body, and present with the Lord; for he considers the soul as having no existence at all separate from the body. He must, therefore, of necessity, be a stranger to any such *strait* as that mentioned by the Apostle. If the question were put to him, or to any of his sentiments, Whether they would choose to abide longer *in the flesh*, (which might be profitable to their connexions,) or immediately depart this life? they would be at no loss what to answer. They could not, in any rational sense, consider death as *gain*. It would be impossible for them, upon their principles, to desire to depart. Conceiving that they come to the possession of heavenly felicity as soon, if they die fifty years hence, as if they were to die at the present time, they must rather desire to live as long as the course of nature will admit: so long, however, as life can be considered as preferable to non-existence. It would indicate even a mean and unworthy temper of mind, upon their principles, to be in such a *strait* as Paul describes. It would imply, that they were weary of their work, and at a loss whether they should choose a cessation of being, or to be employed in serving God, and in doing good to their fellow-creatures.

The NATURE and EMPLOYMENTS of the heavenly state, deserve also to be considered. If you adopt the Calvinistic view of things, you consider the enjoyments and employments of that state in a very different light from that in which Socinian writers represent them. You read, in your Bibles, that *the Lord will be our everlasting light, and our God our glory;* that *our life is hid with Christ in God;* that, *when he shall appear, we shall appear with him in glory;* and that we shall then *be like him; for we shall see him as he is.* Hence you conclude, that A FULL ENJOYMENT OF GOD, AND CONFORMITY TO HIM, ARE THE SUM OF HEAVEN. You read, further, that the bliss in reserve for Christians is *a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;* that *now we are the sons of God, but it doth not yet appear what we shall be*: and, from hence

you naturally conclude, that THE HEAVENLY STATE WILL ABUNDANTLY SURPASS ALL OUR PRESENT CONCEPTIONS OF IT. Again, you read, that *those who shall be found worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels of God.* Hence you conclude, that THE EMPLOYMENTS AND ENJOYMENTS OF THAT STATE ARE ALTOGETHER SPIRITUAL AND HOLY. You read of our knowledge here being *in part;* but that there we shall *know even as we are known;* and that *the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed us, and lead us to living fountains of water.* Hence you conclude, that we shall not only enjoy greater means of knowledge, which, like a fountain, will flow for ever, and assuage our thirsty souls, but that OUR MINDS WILL BE ABUNDANTLY IRRADIATED, AND OUR HEARTS ENLARGED, BY THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST; WHOSE DELIGHTFUL WORK IT WILL BE TO OPEN THE BOOK, AND TO LOOSE THE SEALS; TO UNFOLD THE MYSTERIES OF GOD; AND TO CONDUCT OUR MINDS AMIDST THEIR BOUNDLESS RESEARCHES. Once more: you read, concerning those who shall obtain that world, and the resurrection, *that they cannot die any more;* that they shall *go no more out;* that the *inheritance* to which they are reserved is *incorruptible, and fadeth not away;* and that the weight of glory which we look for, is *eternal.* Hence you conclude, that the IMMORTALITY PROMISED TO CHRISTIANS IS CERTAIN AND ABSOLUTE.

These are very important matters, and must have a great influence in attracting your hearts toward heaven. These were the things which caused the patriarchs to live like strangers and pilgrims on the earth. They looked for a habitation, a better country, even a heavenly one. These were the things that made the Apostles and primitive Christians consider their afflictions as *light* and *momentary. For this cause,* say they, *we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

But, if you adopt the Socinian view of things, your ideas of the heavenly state, compared with the above, will be miserably flat and cold; and consequently, your affections will be more set on things below, and less on things above. Dr. Priestley, in his *Sermon on the Death of Mr. Robinson*, is not only employed in dissuading people from too much thought and fear about death; but from too much *hope* respecting the state beyond it. He seems to fear, lest we should form *too high* expectations of heavenly felicity, and so meet with a disappointment. The heaven which he there describes, does not necessarily include *any one of the foregoing ideas*, but must exist if they were all excluded!

Take his own words: "The change of our condition by death, may not be so great as we are apt to imagine. As our *natures* will not be changed, but only *improved*, we have no reason to think that the *future world* (which will be adapted to our merely improved nature,) will be *materially different from this*. And, indeed, why should we ask or expect any thing more? If we should still be obliged to provide for our subsistence by exercise, or labor; is that a thing to be complained of by those who are supposed to have acquired fixed habits of industry, becoming rational beings, and who have never been able to bear the languor of absolute rest, or indolence? Our future happiness has, with much reason, been supposed to arise from an increase of knowledge.—But if we should have nothing more than the *means* of knowledge furnished us, as we have here, but be left to our own labor to find it out; is that to be complained of by those who will have acquired a *love of truth*, and a habit of inquiring after it? To make discoveries ourselves, though the search may require time and labor, is unspeakably more pleasing than to learn every thing by the information of others.* If the *immortality* that is promised to us in the gospel, should not be *necessary* and *absolute*, and we should only have the *certain means* of making ourselves immortal, we should have much to be thankful for. What the scriptures inform us concerning a future life, is expressly in general terms, and often

*Is not this the rock on which Dr. Priestley and his brethren split? Have they not, on this very principle, coined a gospel of their own, instead of receiving the instructions of the sacred writers?

in figurative language. A more particular knowledge of it is wisely concealed from us.*

You see, brethren, here is not one word of God, or of Christ, as being the sum and substance of our bliss; and, except that mention is made of our being freed from "imperfections bodily and mental," the whole consists of mere *natural* enjoyments; differing from the paradise of Mahometans chiefly in this, that their enjoyments are principally sensual, whereas these are mostly intellectual. Those are adapted to gratify the voluptuary, and these the philosopher. Whether such a heaven will suit a holy mind, or be adapted to draw forth our best affections, judge ye.

I am, &c.

* Page 18.

LETTER XV.

ON THE RESEMBLANCE BETWEEN SOCINIANISM AND INFIDELITY, AND THE TENDENCY OF THE ONE TO THE OTHER.

Christian Brethren,

I SUPPOSE we may take it for granted, at present, that Christianity is favorable to true virtue, and that Infidelity is the reverse. If it can be proved, therefore, that Socinianism resembles Infidelity, in several of its leading features, and has a direct tendency towards it, that will be the same as proving it unfavorable to true virtue.

It has been observed, and I think justly, that "there is no consistent medium between genuine Christianity and Infidelity." The smallest departure from the one, is a step towards the other.—There are different degrees of approach, but all move on in the same direction. Socinians, however, are not willing to own that their scheme has any such tendency. Dr. Priestley appears to be more than a little hurt, at being represented by the bigots, (as he politely calls those who think ill of his principles,) as undermining Christianity; and intimates that, by their rigid attachment to certain doctrines, some are forced into Infidelity, while others are saved from it by his conciliating principles.* Many things to the

* Here the late Mr. Robinson, of Cambridge, is brought in as an example; who, as some think, in an excess of complaisance, told the Doctor, in a private letter, that, "but for his friendly aid, he feared he should have gone from enthusiasm to Deism." *Letters to Mr. Burn*, Preface. To say nothing, whether the use Dr. Priestley made of this *private letter* was warrantable, and whether it would not have been full as modest to have forborne to publish to the world so high a compliment on himself; supposing not only the thing itself to have been strictly true, but that the conduct of Dr. Priestley was as strictly proper; what does it prove? Nothing, except that the region of Socinianism is so near to that of Deism, that, now and then, an individual, who was on the high road to the one, has stopped short, and taken up with the other.

same purpose, are advanced by Mr. Lindsey, in his *Discourse addressed to the Congregation at the Chapel in Essex-Street, Strand, on resigning the Pastoral Office among them.* We are to accommodate our religion, it seems, to the notions and inclinations of Infidels; and then they would condescend to receive it. This principle of *accommodation* has been already noticed in Letter III. And it has been shown, from the example of the Popish Missionaries in China, to have no good tendency. To remove every stumbling-block out of the way of Infidels, would be to annihilate the gospel. Such attempts, also, suppose what is not true; That their not believing in Christianity, is owing to some fault in the system, as generally received, and not to the temper of their own minds. Faults there are, no doubt: but if their hearts were right, they would search the scriptures for themselves, and form their own sentiments according to the best of their capacity.

The near relation of the system of Socinians to that of Infidels, may be proved, from the agreement of their principles, their prejudices, their spirit, and their success.

First: There is an agreement in their *leading principles.* One of the most important principles in the scheme of Infidelity, it is well known, is THE SUFFICIENCY OF HUMAN REASON. This is the great bulwark of the cause, and the main ground on which its advocates proceed in rejecting revelation. If the one, say they, be sufficient, the other is unnecessary. Whether the Socinians do not adopt the same principle, and follow hard after the Deists in its application too, we will now inquire. When Mr. Burn charged Dr. Priestley with making the reason of the individual the sole umpire in matters of faith," the Doctor denied the charge, and supposed that Mr. Burn must have been "reading the writings of Bolingbroke, Hume, or Voltaire, and have imagined them to be his:" as if none but professed Infidels maintained that principle. This, however, is allowing it to be a principle pertaining to Infidelity; and of such importance, it should seem, as to distinguish it from Christianity. If it should prove, therefore, that the same principle occupies a place, yea, and an equally important place, in the Socinian scheme, it will follow, that Socinianism and Deism must be nearly allied. But, Dr. Priestley, as was said, denies the

charge; and tells us, that he "has written a great deal to prove *the insufficiency of human reason:*" he also accuses Mr. Burn, of "the grossest and most unfounded calumny," in charging such a principle upon him.*

If what Mr. Burn alleges be "a gross and unfounded calumny," it is rather extraordinary, that such a number of respectable writers should have suggested the same thing. I suppose there has been scarcely a writer of any note among us, but who, if this be calumny, has calumniated the Socinians. If there be any credit due to Trinitarian authors, they certainly have hitherto *understood* matters in a different light from that in which they are here represented. They have supposed, whether rightly or not, that their opponents in general, do hold the very principle which Dr. Priestley so strongly disavows.

But this is not all. If what Mr. Burn allows be a gross and unfounded calumny, it is not more extraordinary, that Socinian writers should calumniate themselves. Mr. Robinson, whom Dr. Priestley glories in as his convert, affirms much the same thing; and that, in his *History of Baptism*, a work published after he had adopted the Socinian system. In answering an objection brought against the Baptists, as being enthusiasts, he asks, "Were Castelio, and Servetus, Socinus, and Crellius, enthusiasts? On the contrary, they are taxed with attributing *too much to reason*, AND THE SUFFICIENCY OF REASON IS THE SOUL OF THEIR SYSTEM."* If the last member of this sentence be true, and Dr. Priestley has maintained the same principle as much as any of his predecessors; then is what Mr. Burn alleges true also, and no calumny. Further: If Mr. Robinson's words be true, the system of a Socinus, and of a Bolingbroke, however they may differ in some particulars, cannot be very wide asunder. They may be *two bodies;* but the difference cannot be very material, so long as those bodies are inhabited by ONE SOUL.

But was not Mr. Robinson mistaken? has he not inadvertently granted that which ought not in justice to have been granted? suppose this to be a fact, why might not the same construction have

* Letters to Mr. Burn, *Letter* IV.

* Page 47.

been put upon what is alleged by Mr. Burn, and other Trinitarian writers, instead of calling it by the hard name of "gross and unfounded Calumny?" If we say no worse of our opponents than they say of themselves, they can have no just grounds of complaint; at least, they should complain with less severity.

Further: If Mr. Robinson was mistaken, and if Dr. Priestley do really maintain *the insufficiency of human reason* in matters of religion; it will follow, after all that he has pleaded in behalf of reason, that he is no better friend to it than other people. The Doctor often reminds his Calvinistic opponents of an *old saying*, that "No man is against reason, till reason is against him." Old sayings, to be sure, prove much in argument. This old saying, however, is very just, provided the term *reason* be understood of *the real fitness of things*. Dr. Priestley's opponents are not against reason in this sense of the word; but against setting up *the reason of the individual* as umpire in matters of faith: and this, we see, is no more than the Doctor himself disavows; in that he supposes a principle of this kind is no where to be found, except in such writings as those of Bolingbroke, of Hume, or of Voltaire. He tells us, that he has "written much to prove the *insufficiency* of human reason, and the necessity of divine revelation." He is then professedly *against reason* in the same sense as his opponents are; and the Deists might remind him of his "old saying," with as much propriety as he reminds other people of it.

Once more: If Mr. Robinson was mistaken, and if his concession be beyond the bounds of justice and propriety; it will follow, that, notwithstanding what Dr. Priestley has said of *saving him from Infidelity*, he was not saved from it after all. Whether Mr. Robinson's words convey a just idea of Socinianism, or not, they must be allowed to express what were *his own ideas* of it. Whatever, therefore, Dr. Priestley believes, *he* appears to have believed in *the sufficiency of reason*. But if none besides Infidels maintain that principle, it must follow, that Dr. Priestley's glorying in Mr. Robinson is vain; and that, so far from saving him from Infidelity, as he boasts, he was not saved from it; but was the disciple of a Bolingbroke, of a Hume or of a Voltaire, rather than of a Priestley.

But, after all, was Mr. Robinson indeed mistaken? Is not "the sufficiency of reason the soul of the Socinian system?" It is true, Socinians do not openly plead, as do the Deists, that reason is *so* sufficient, as that revelation is unnecessary; nor is it supposed, that Mr. Robinson meant to acknowledge that they did. But do they not constantly advance what amounts to the same thing? I do not know what publications Dr. Priestley refers to, when he speaks of having written a great deal to prove the "insufficiency of human reason, and the necessity of divine revelation:" but, if it be upon the same principles as those which he avows in his other productions, I do not see how he can have proved his point. According to these principles, the sacred writers were as liable to err as other men, and, in some instances, actually did err; producing "lame accounts, improper quotations, and inconclusive reasonings;" and it is the province of reason, not only to judge of their credentials, but of the particular doctrines which they advance.* Now, this is not only "making the reason of the individual the sole umpire in matters of faith," but virtually rendering revelation unnecessary. If the reason of the individual be to sit supreme judge, and insist that every doctrine which revelation proposes shall approve itself to its dictates, or be rejected; the necessity of the latter might as well be totally denied. If it be necessary, however, it is no otherwise, than as a French parliament used to be necessary to a French king; not in order to dictate to His Majesty, but to afford a sanction to his resolutions; or, at most, to tender him a little advice, in order to assist him in forming his judgment; which advice, notwithstanding, he might receive or reject, as best suited his inclination.

Dr. Priestley often suggests, that he makes no other use of human reason, than all Protestants make against the Papists, when pleading against the doctrine of transubstantiation; that is, where the literal sense of a text involves an absurdity, he so far allows the dictates of reason as to understand it figuratively. But this is not the case: for the question here does not at all respect the *meaning* of scripture, whether it should be understood literally or fig-

* See Letter XII.

uratively ; but whether its *allowed* meaning ought to be accepted as truth, any further than it corresponds with our pre-conceived notions of what is reason ? According to the principles and charges above cited, it ought not ; and this is not only summoning revelation to the bar of our own understandings, but actually passing sentence against it.

The near affinity of Socinianism to Deism is so manifest, that it is in vain to disown it. Nobody supposes them to be entirely the same. One acknowledges Christ to be a true prophet ; the other considers him as an impostor : but the denial of the proper inspiration of the scriptures, with the receiving of some part of them as true, and the rejecting of other parts even of the same books, as "lame accounts, improper quotations, and inconclusive reasonings," naturally lead to Deism. Deists themselves do not so reject the Bible as to disbelieve every historical event which is there recorded. They would not deny, I suppose, that there were such characters in the world as Abraham, Moses, and Jesus; and that some things which are written concerning each are true.

In short, they take what they like best, as they would from any other ancient history, and reject the rest: and what does Dr. Priestley even pretend to, more? He does not reject *so much* as a Deist; he admits various articles which the other denies : but the difference is only in degree. The relation between the first and leading principles of their respective systems is so near, that one spirit may be said to pervade them both ; or to use the imagery of Mr. Robinson, one soul inhabits these different bodies. The opposition between faith and unbelief is so great in the scriptures, that no less than salvation is promised to the one, and damnation threatened to the other ; but, if they were no further assunder than Socinianism and Deism, it is passing strange that their consequences should be so widely different.

Another leading principle, common to Socinians and Deists, is *the non-importance of principle itself, in order to the enioyment of the divine favour.* Nothing is more common than for professed Infidels to exclaim against Christianity, on account of its rendering the belief of the gospel necessary to salvation. Lord Shaftesbury insinuates, that the heathen magistrates, in the first ages of

Christianity, might have been justly offended "with a notion which treated them, and all men, as profane, impious, and damned, who entered not into particular modes of worship, of which there had been formerly so many thousand kinds instituted, all of them compatible, and sociable, till that time."* To the same purpose is what Mr. Paine advances; who, I imagine, would make no pretence of friendship towards Christianity. "If we suppose a large family of children," says he, "who on any particular day, or particular circumstance, made it a custom to present to their parents some token of their affection and gratitude, each of them would make a different offering, and, most probably, in a different manner. Some would pay their congratulations in themes, of verse or prose, by some little devices as their genius dictated, or according to what they thought would please; and, perhaps, the least of all, not able to do any of those things, would ramble into the garden or the field, and gather what it thought the prettiest flower it could find, though, perhaps it might be but a simple weed. The parent would be more gratified by such a variety, than if the whole of them had acted on a concerted plan, and each had made exactly the same offering."† And this he applies, not merely to the diversified modes of worshipping God, which come within the limits of the divine command, but to the various ways in which mankind have, in all ages and nations, worshipped, or pretended to worship, a deity. The sentiment which this writer and all others of his stamp, wish to propagate, is, That, in all modes of religion, men may be very sincere; and that, in being so, all are alike acceptable to God. This is infidelity undisguised. Yet this is no more than Dr. Priestley has advanced in his *Differences in Religious Opinions*, "If we can be so happy," he says, "as to believe, that all differences in modes of worship may be only the different methods by which different men (who are equally *the offspring of God*) are endeavouring to honour and obey their common parent,

* Characteristics, Vol. I, § 3.

† Rights of Man, *Part* II, near the conclusion.

our differences of opinion would have no tendency to lessen our mutual love and esteem."*

Nor is Dr. Priestley the only writer of the party who unites with the author of *The age of Reason*, in maintaining that it matters not what religion we are of, if we be but sincere in it. Dr. Toulmin has laboured to defend this notion, and to prove, from Acts x. 34, 35, and Rom. ii. 6, 10, 12, that it was maintained by Peter and Paul.† But, before he had pretended to palm it upon them, he should have made it evident, that Cornelius, when he *feared God, and worked righteousness*, and those Gentiles, when they are supposed to have *worked good*, and to be heirs of *glory, honour, and peace*, were each of them actually living in idolatry; and, being sincere, that God was well pleased with it. It is no part of the question, whether Heathens may be saved: but whether they may be saved *in their Heathenism;* and whether Heathenism and Christianity be only different modes of worshipping our common Father, and alike acceptable to him?

Several other principles might be mentioned, in which Socinians and Deists are agreed, and in which the same objections that are made by the one, against Calvinism, are made, by the other, against the holy scriptures. Do Socinians reject the Calvinistic system, because it represents God as a vindictive being? For the same reason, the scriptures themselves are rejected by the Deists. Are the former offended with Calvinism, on account of the doctrines of atonement, and divine sovereignty? The latter are equally offended with the Bible for the same reasons. They know very well, that these doctrines are contained in the scriptures; but they dislike them, and reject the scriptures, partly on account of them. The sufficiency of repentance to secure the divine favour; the evil of sin consisting merely in its tendency to injure the creature; all punishment being for the good of the offender, as well as for the public good; with various other principles which are opposed in these Letters in defence of Calvinism; are the same things, for substance, which those who have written against the Deists have had to encounter, when defending

* Sect. II. † Practical Efficacy, pp. 164, 165, 2nd. Edit.

revelation.* It is a consolation to us to trace these likenesses: as it affords a presumption that our sentiments accord with the scriptures, being liable to the same objections.

Socinian writers not only make the same objections to Calvinism, which Deists make to revelation, but, in some instances, have so far forgotten themselves, as to unite with the latter in pointing their objections against revelation itself. Steinbart and Semler, (as quoted in Letter XII.) have fallen foul upon the writers of the Old and New Testament. "Moses," says the former, "according to the childish conceptions of the Jews in his days, paints God as agitated by violent affections; partial to one people, and hating all other nations." "Peter," says the latter, 2 Epistle i. 21. "speaks according to the conception of the Jews; and the prophets may have delivered the offspring of their own brains as divine revelations."† The infidelity of Socinians is frequently covered with a very thin disguise; but here the veil is entirely thrown off. One thing, however, is sufficiently evident: while they vent their antipathy against the holy scriptures in such indecent language, they betray a consciousness that the contents of that sacred volume are against them.

The likeness of Socinianism to Deism will further appear, if we consider, Secondly, The similarity of their *prejudices*. The peculiar prejudices of Deists are drawn, I think, with great justness, by Dr. Priestley himself. "There is no class or description of men," he observes, "but what are subject to peculiar prejudices; and every prejudice must operate as an obstacle to the reception of some truth. It is in vain for unbelievers to pretend to be free from prejudices, they may indeed be free from those of the vulgar; but they have others, peculiar to themselves: and the very affectation of being free from vulgar prejudices, and of being wiser than the rest of mankind, must indispose them to the admission even of truth, if it should happen to be with the common people. The suspicion, that the faith of the vulgar is superstitious and false, is, no doubt, often well-founded; be-

* See Leland's Defence of Christianity against Tindall, Vol. I. Chap. IV, VI, VIII.

† Dr. Erskine's Sketches and Hints of Church History, No. III. pp. 65-71.

cause they, of course, maintain the *oldest opinions*, while the speculative part of mankind are making new discoveries in science. Yet we often find that they who pride themselves on their being the farthest removed from superstition in some things, are the greatest dupes to it in others; and it is not universally true, that all old opinions are false, and all new ones well-founded. An aversion to the creed of the vulgar may, therefore, mislead a man; and, from a fondness for singularity, he may be singularly in the wrong.*

Let those who are best acquainted with Socinians judge, whether this address, with a very few alterations, be not equally adapted to them, as to professed unbelievers. We know who they are, besides avowed Infidels, who affect to be "emancipated from *vulgar prejudices* and *popular superstitions*, and to embrace a rational system of faith."† It is very common with Socinian writers, as much as it is with Deists, to value themselves on being wiser than the rest of mankind, and to despise the judgment of plain Christians, as being the judgment of the *vulgar* and the *populace*. It is true, Dr. Priestley has addressed Letters to the common people at Birmingham, and has complimented them with being "capable of judging in matters of religion and government." However, it is no great compliment to Christians in general, of that description, to suppose, as he frequently does, not only that the Trinitarian system, but every other, was the invention of learned men in different ages, and that the vulgar have always been led by their influence. "The creed of the vulgar of the present day," he observes, "is to be considered not so much as *their* creed, for they were not the inventors of it, as that of the thinking and inquisitive in some former period. For those whom we distinguish by the appellation of the *vulgar*, are not those who introduce any new opinions, but those who receive them from others, of whose judgment they have been led to think highly."‡ On this princi-

*Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever, *Part* II. *Letter* V.

† Mr. Belsham's Sermon, pp. 4—32.

‡ Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever, *Part* II. *Letter* V.

ple, Dr. Priestley somewhere expresses his persuasion of the future prevalence of Unitarianism. He grants, that, at present, the body of common Christians are against it; but, as the learned and the speculative are verging towards it, he supposes the other will, in time, follow them. What is this, but supposing them incapable of forming religious sentiments for themselves; as if the Bible were to them a sealed book, and they had only to believe the system that happened to be in fashion, or, rather, *to have been* in fashion some years before they were born, and to dance after the pipe of learned men?

It is acknowledged, that, in matters of human science, common people, having no standard to judge by, are generally led by the learned; but surely it is somewhat different in religion, where we have a standard; and one, too, that is adapted to the understanding of the simple. However, many people may be led implicitly by others, yet there will always be a number of plain, intelligent, serious Christians, who will read the Bible, and judge for themselves; and Christians of this description will always have a much greater influence even upon those who do not judge for themselves, than mere speculative men, whom the most ignorant cannot but perceive to be wanting in serious religion, and respect to mankind; and while this is the case, there is no great danger of the body of common Christians becoming Socinians.

Thirdly: There is a *bold, profane, and daring spirit*, discovered in the writings of Infidels; a spirit that fears not to speak of sacred things with the most indecent freedom. They love to speak of Christ with a sneer, calling him *the carpenter's son*, *the Galilean*, or some such name, which, in their manner of expressing it, conveys an idea of contempt. Though Socinians do not go such lengths as these, yet they follow hard after them in their profane and daring manner of speaking. Were it proper to refer to the speeches of private individuals, language might be produced, very little inferior in contempt, to any of the foregoing modes of expression: and even some of those who have appeared as authors, have discovered a similar temper. Besides the examples of Eugedin, Gagneius, Steinbart, and Semler, (as quoted in Letter XII.) the *magnanimity* which has been ascribed to Dr.

Priestley for censuring the Mosaic narrative of the fall of man, calling it "a LAME account," is an instance of the same irreverent spirit.

Fourthly: The alliance of Socinianism to Deism, may be inferred from this, that the success of the one, bears a proportion to that of the other, and resembles it in the most essential points. Socinians are continually boasting of their success, and of the great increase of their numbers; so also are the Deists, and I suppose with equal reason. The number of the latter has certainly increased in the present century, in as great, if not a greater proportion, than the former. The truth is, a spirit of infidelity is the main temptation of the present age, as a persecuting superstition was of ages past. This spirit has long gone forth into the world. In different denominations of men it exists in different degrees, and appears to be permitted to try them that dwell upon the earth. Great multitudes are carried away with it; and no wonder: for it disguises itself under a variety of specious names; such as *liberality*, *candour* and *charity;* by which it imposes upon the unwary. It flatters human pride; calls evil propensity *nature;* and gives loose to its dictates: and, in proportion as it prevails in the judgments, as well as in the hearts of men, it serves to abate the fears of death and judgment, and so makes them more cheerful than they otherwise would be.

It is also worthy of notice, that the success of Socinianism and Deism has been among the same sort of people; namely, *men of a speculative turn of mind.* Dr. Priestley somewhere observes, that "learned men begin more and more to suspect the doctrine of the Trinity;" and possibly it may be so. But then it might, with equal truth, be affirmed, that learned men begin more and more to suspect Christianity. Dr. Priestley himself acknowledges, that "among those who are called philosophers, the unbelievers are the crowd."* It is true, he flatters himself, that their numbers *will* diminish, and, that "the evidences of Christianity will meet with a more impartial examination in the present day, than they have done in the last fifty years." But this is mere conjecture, such as has no foundation in fact. We may as well flat-

* Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever, Vol. II. p. 32.

ter ourselves that Socinians will diminish : there is equal reason for the one as for the other. It is not impossible that the number of both may be diminished in some future time ; but when that time shall come, it is not for us to say.

It may be suggested, that it is a circumstance not much in favour either of the doctrine of the Trinity, or of Christianity, that such a number of philosophers and learned men suspect them. But, unfavorable as this circumstance may appear to some, there are others who view it in a very different light. The late Mr. Robinson, of Cambridge, always contended, that common Christians were in a more favourable state for the discovery of religious truth, than either the rich or the learned. And Dr. Priestley not only admits, but accounts for it. " Learned men," he says, " have *prejudices* peculiar to themselves ; and the very affectation of being free from vulgar prejudices, and of being wiser than the rest of mankind, must indispose them to the admission even of truth, if it should happen to be with the common people." If *not many wise men after the flesh* are found among the friends of Christianity, or of what we account its peculiar doctrines, is it any other than what might have been alleged against the primitive church ? The things of God, in their times, were *hid from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes*, and that because it seemed *good in his sight*.

It is further worthy of notice, that the same *disregard of religion in general*, which is allowed by our opponents to be favourable to Socinianism, is equally favourable to Deism. Dr. Priestley describes unbelievers of a certain age amongst us, as " having heard Christianity from their infancy, as having, in general, believed it for some time, and *as not coming to disbelieve it till they had long disregarded it*."* A disregard of Christianity, then, preceded their openly rejecting it, and embracing the scheme of Infidelity. Now this is the very process of a great number of Socinian converts, as both the Doctor and Mr. Belsham elsewhere acknowledge. It is by a disregard of all religion that men become Infidels ; and it is by the same means that others become Socinians.

* Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever, Vol. II. Preface p. 9.

The foregoing observations may suffice to show the *resemblance* of Socinianism to Deism. It remains for me to consider the *tendency* of the one to the other.

Dr. Priestley seems to admit, that his scheme approaches nearer to that of unbelievers than ours; but then he disowns its having any tendency, on that account, to lead men to Infidelity. On the contrary, he retorts the charge upon his opponents, and asserts his own scheme to have an opposite effect. "An enemy as I am considered to Christianity, by some," says he, "I have saved many from that Infidelity into which the bigots are forcing them." The case of the late Mr. Robinson is here introduced as an example to confirm this assertion. The reasoning of Dr. Priestley, on this subject, resembles that of Archbishop Laud, on another. When accused of leaning to Popery, he denied the charge, and gave in a list of *twenty-one* persons, whom he had not merely saved from going over to that religion, but actually *converted* them from it to the Protestant faith.* Yet few thinking people imagine the principles of Laud to have been very unfriendly to Popery; much less that they were adapted to save men from it.

That Socinianism has a direct tendency to Deism, will appear from the following considerations. First: By giving up the plenary inspiration of the scriptures, and allowing them to be the production of fallible men, (of men, who, though too honest knowingly to impose upon others, were, notwithstanding, so far under the influence of inattention, of prejudice, and of misinformation, as to be capable of being imposed upon themselves,) Socinians furnish Infidels with a handle for rejecting them. To give up the plenary inspiration of the scriptures, is to give them up as *the word of God*, and as *binding upon the consciences of men:* to which our opponents apparently have no objection. They are seldom, if ever, known to warn mankind, that the rejection of the holy scriptures will endanger their eternal welfare. Nor can they do so, consistently with what they elsewhere plead for, that "all differences in modes of worship, may be only different modes of endeavouring to honour and obey our common Parent" Under the pre-

* Neale's History of the Puritans. Vol. III. Index, Art. Laud.

tence of appealing to the *reason* of unbelievers, they neglect to address themselves to their hearts and consciences. If the cause of Infidelity lie in the want of evidence, or if those who leaned towards it were ingenious and disinterested inquirers after truth, solemn warnings might be less necessary. But, if it lie in the temper of their hearts, which blinds their minds to the most convincing proofs, their hearts and consciences must be addressed, as well as their understandings. The sacred writers and preachers always proceeded upon this principle. This only will account for such language as the following: *The blindness of their* HEART.—*Lest they should understand with their* HEART, *and be converted.*—REPENT *and believe the gospel.—If God, peradventure, will give them* REPENTANCE *to the acknowledging of the truth.* This was the method of John the Baptist, of Christ, and his apostles, in their addresses to unbelievers: and whatever addresses are made to Infidels, whether Jews or Deists, in which the *sin* of unbelief and the *danger* of persisting in it, are not insisted on, they will tend to harden them in Infidelity, rather than to recover them out of it. Dr. Priestley, in effect, acknowledges, that the cause of Infidelity lies in the temper of the heart; and yet, when he addresses himself to Infidels, he seems to consider them as merely in want of evidence, and fosters in them an idea of their security, notwithstanding their rejection of the gospel. This is manifestly the tendency of his *Letters to the Philosophers and Politicians of France.*

Dr. Priestley acknowledges, that men *seldom reject Christianity in theory, till they have long disregarded it in practice.** That is, they seldom believe it to be false, without their hearts being fully inclined to have it so. Let us then consider a character of this description, in his examination of Christianity. He has long disregarded the practice of it, and begins now to hesitate about its truth. If he read a defence of it upon our principles, he will find the authority of heaven vindicated; his own sceptical spirit condemned; and is warned that he fall not upon a rock that will prove his eternal ruin. He throws it aside in resentment; calls

* Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever, Vol. II. *Preface*, p. ix.

the writer a bigot; and considers the *warning* given him, as an insult to his dignity. Still, however, there is a sting left behind, which he knows not how to extract; a something which says within him, *How, if it should be true?* He takes up a defence of Christianity upon Socinian principles; suppose Dr. Priestley's *Letters to the Philosophers and Politicians of France.* He is now brought to a better humour. Here is no *threatening;* no imminent danger. The sting is extracted. The reasoning, in many parts, is plausible; but, having long wished to disbelieve Christianity, it makes little or no impression upon him; especially as it seems to be of no *great* consequence if he do so. It is only rejecting that entirely, which professed Christians reject in part. It is only throwing off the testimony and opinions of fallible men. What will be his next step, is not very difficult to conjecture.

By allowing part of the Gospels to be *spurious*, Socinian writers enable the *Jews* to ask, with an air of triumph, "How are we sure that the remainder is authentic?"* We are often told, that the Jews can never embrace what is called orthodox Christianity, because of its inconsistency with one of the first principles of their religion, the *unity* of God. We do not ask them, however, to give up the unity of God. On the contrary, we are fully persuaded, that our principles are entirely consistent with it. But this is more than our opponents can say, with regard to the inspiration of the scriptures; a principle as sacred, and as important with the Jews, as the unity of God itself. Were they to embrace Dr. Priestley's notions of Christianity, they must give up this principle, and consider their own sacred writings in a much meaner light than they at present do. They have no conception of the Old Testament being a mere, "authentic history of past transactions;" but profess to receive it as the very *word of God; the infallible rule of faith and practice.* Whenever they shall receive the New Testament, there is reason to conclude it will be under the same character, and for the same purposes. While they consider their own scriptures as divinely inspired, and hear professed Christians acknowledge, that "part of their Gospels is spurious;"

* Mr. D. Levi's Letters to Dr. Priestley, p. 82.

they will be tempted to look down upon Christianity with scorn, and so be hardened in their infidelity.

Secondly: If the sacred writings be not received for the purposes for which they were professedly given, and for which they were actually appealed to by Christ and his apostles, they are in effect, rejected; and those who pretend to embrace them for other purposes, will themselves be found to have passed the boundaries of Christianity, and to be walking in the paths of Infidelity. We have seen, in Letter XII. that the scriptures *profess* to be *the word of God, and the rule of faith and practice.* Now, if any man believe in revelation, he must receive it as being what it professes to be and for all the purposes for which it professes to have been written. The Monthly Review suggests, that "the scriptures were never designed to settle disputed theories, or to decide speculative, controverted questions, even in religion and morality."* But, if so, what must we think of their assuming to be the rule of faith and practice? what must we think of Christ and his apostles, who appealed to them for the truth of their doctrines and the goodness of their precepts? On the principles of our opponents, they must have been either weak or wicked. If they considered them as the standard of faith and practice, they must have been weak: if they did not, and yet appealed to them as a decisive test, they were certainly wicked. In either case, their testimony is unworthy of regard; which is downright Infidelity.

Thirdly: By the degrading notions which Socinians entertain of the person of Christ, they do what in them lies to lessen the sin of rejecting him; and afford the adversaries of the gospel a ground for accusing him of presumption; which must necessarily harden them in unbelief. The Jews consider their nation, according to the sentimentss of orthodox Christians, as lying under the charge of "crucifying the LORD and SAVIOUR of the world; but, according to those of Dr. Priestley, as only having crucified "a *prophet*, that was sent to them in the first instance."† Such a consideration diminishes the degree of their guilt; tends to render them

* Monthly Review Enlarged, Vol. X. p. 357.

† Mr. David Levi's Letters to Dr. Priestley, p. 14

more indifferent; and, conquently, must harden them in infidelity. By considering our Lord as *merely* a prophet, Socinians also furnish the Jews with the charge of *presumption;* a weighty objection, indeed, against his Messiahship! "He preached *himself*," says Mr. Levi, "*as the light of the world;* which is an instance not to be paralleled in scripture: for the duty of a prophet consisted in his delivery of God's word or message to the people; not in presumptuously preaching himself. Again, we meet with the same example in John xiv. 6. where Jesus preaches *himself*, as *the way, the truth, and the life.*" From all which he concludes, "It is manifest that he was not sent by God to us as a prophet; seeing he was so deficient in the essential character of a prophet."* How Dr. Priestley, upon his principles, will be able to answer this reasoning, I cannot tell. Though he has written a reply to Mr. Levi, I observe he has passed over this part of the subject very lightly; offered nothing that sufficiently accounts for our Lord's preaching himself as *the light of the world, the way, the truth, and the life*, upon the supposition of his being merely a prophet.

Fourthly: The progress which Socinianism has made, has generally been towards Infidelity. The ancient Socinians, though they went great lengths, are, nevertheless, far outdone by the moderns. If we look over the *Racovian Catechism*, printed at Amsterdam in 1652, we shall find such sentiments as the following. "No suspicion can possibly creep into the mind concerning those authors, (the sacred writers,) as if they had not had exact cognizance of the things which they described; in that some of them were eye and ear-witnesses of the things which they set down, and the others were fully and accurately informed by them concerning the same. It is altogether incredible, that God, whose goodness and providence are immense, hath suffered those writings wherein he hath proposed his will, and the way to eternal life, and which, through the succession of so many ages, have, by all the godly, been received and approved as such, to be any ways corrupted."† I need not go about to prove, that these sen-

* Mr. David Levi's Letters to Dr. Priestley, p. 24.

† Racovian Catechism, p. 3. 4.

timents are betrayed into the hands of Infidels by modern Socinians. Dr. Priestley, (as we have seen in Letter XII.) supposes the sacred writers to have written upon subjects "to which they had not given much attention, and concerning which they had not the means of exact information," and, in such cases, considered himself at liberty to disregard their productions. Instead of maintaining that the sacred writings, cannot have been corrupted, modern Socinians are continually labouring to prove that they *are* so.

Some, who are better acquainted with Socinians and Deists, than I profess to be, have observed, that it is very common for those who go over to Infidelity, to pass through Socinianism, in their way. If this be the case, it is no more than may be expected according to the natural course of things. It is not common I believe, for persons who go over to Socinianism, to go directly from Calvinism, but through one or other of the different stages of Arminianism, or Arianism, or both. Dr. Priestley was once, as he himself informs us, "a Calvinist, and that of the straitest sect. Afterwards," he adds, "he became a High Arian, next a Low Arian, and then a Socinian, and then, in a little time, a Socinian of the lowest kind, in which Christ is considered as a mere man, the son of Joseph and Mary, and, naturally, as fallible and peccable as Moses, or any other prophet:" to which he might have added, and in which the plenary inspiration of the scriptures is given up.* The Doctor also informs us, that he "does not know when his creed will be fixed."† And yet he tells us, in his volume of Sermons, (page 95,) that "Unitarians are not apt to entertain any doubt of the truth of their principles." But this, I suppose, is to be understood of their principles only in one point of view; namely, as they are opposed to what is commonly called orthodoxy: for as they are opposed to Infidelity, they are apt to entertain doubts concerning them, as much, and perhaps more than any other men; and, in that line of improvement, to hold themselves open to the reception of greater and greater illuminations. It is in this direc-

*Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever, *Part* II. pp. 33—35.

†Defence of Unitarianism, for 1787, p. 111.

tion that Dr. Priestley has generally moved hitherto: and should he, before he fixes his creed, go one degree further, is there any doubt where that degree will land him? Should it be upon the shores of downright Infidelity, it can afford no greater matter of surprise to the Christian world, than that of an Arian becoming a Socinian, or a Deist an Atheist.

By the following extract from a letter, which I received from a gentleman of candour and veracity, and extensive acquaintance in the literary world, it appears, that several of the most eminent characters amongst professed unbelievers in the present age, were but a few years ago, in the scheme of Socinus: "I think I may say, without exaggeration, that, of my acquaintance, the greater part of *literary* men who have become Unitarians, are either sceptics, or strongly tending that way. I could instance in ——, ——, ——, ——, ——, ——, and many others. About four months ago, I had a pretty long conversation with one of the above gentlemen, (as intelligent as any man I know,) on this subject. He reminded me of a conversation that had passed betwixt us about a year and a half before, in which I had observed, there was a near affinity between Unitarianism and Deism; and told me, he was then rather surprised I should suppose so, but that now he was, completely of that opinion; and that from very extensive observations, there was nothing he was more certain of, than that the one led to the other. He remarked how much Dr. Priestley was mistaken, in supposing he could, by cashiering orthodoxy, form what he called Rational Christians; for that, after following him thus far, they would be almost sure to carry their speculations to a still greater extent. All the professed unbelievers I have met with, rejoice in the spread of Unitarianism, as favourable to their views."

Christian brethren, permit me to request, that the subject may be seriously considered. Whether the foregoing positions be sufficiently proved, it becomes not me to decide. A reflection or two, however may be offered, upon the supposition that they are so; and with these I shall conclude.

First: If that system which embraces the deity and atonement of Christ, with other correspondent doctrines, be friendly to a life of sobriety, righteousness, and godliness; it must be of God, and it

becomes us to abide by it; not because it is the doctrine of Calvin, or of any other man that was uninspired, but as being *the gospel which we have received* from Christ and his apostles; *wherein we stand, and by which we are saved.*

Secondly: If that system of religion which rejects the deity and atonement of Christ, with other correspondent doctrines, be unfriendly to the conversion of sinners to a life of holiness, and of professed unbelievers, to faith in Christ; if it be a system which irreligious men are the first, and serious Christians the last to embrace; if it be found to relax the obligations to virtuous affection and behaviour, by relaxing the great standard of virtue itself; if it promote neither love to God under his own true character, nor benevolence to men, as it is exemplified in the spirit of Christ and his apostles; if it lead those who embrace it to be wise in their own eyes, and, instead of humbly deprecating God's righteous displeasure, even in their dying moments, arrogantly to challenge his justice: if the charity which it inculcates be founded in an indifference to divine truth; if it be inconsistent with ardent love to Christ, and veneration for the holy scriptures; if the happiness which it promotes be at variance with the joys of the gospel: and, finally, if it diminish the motives to gratitude, obedience, and heavenly mindedness, and have a natural tendency to Infidelity; it must be an immoral system, and consequently not of God. It is not the gospel of Christ, but *another gospel.* Those who preach it, preach *another Jesus*, whom the apostles did not preach; and those who receive it, receive *another spirit*, which they never imbibed. It is not the light which cometh from above, but a cloud of darkness that hath arisen from beneath, tending to eclipse it. It is not the high way of truth, which is a way of holiness; but a bye-path of error, which misleads the unwary traveller; and of which, as we value our immortal interests, it becomes us to beware. We need not be afraid of evidence, or of free inquiry. For if irreligious men be the first, and serious Christians be the last, who embrace the Socinian system; it is easy to perceive, that the avenues which lead to it are not, as its abettors would persuade you to

think, an openness to conviction, or a free and impartial inquiry after truth; but *a heart secretly disaffected to the true character and government of God, and dissatisfied with the gospel-way of salvation.*

I am,

Christian Brethren,

Respectfully and Affectionately yours,

ANDREW FULLER.

POSTSCRIPT.

On the first appearance of the foregoing Letters, in 1793, some of the most respectable characters amongst the Socinians, and who have since affected to treat them with contempt, acknowledged that they were "well worthy of their attention." No answer, however, appeared to them till 1796, when Dr. Toulmin published his *Practical Efficacy of the Unitarian Doctrine*, and Mr. Kentish his sermon, on *the moral Tendency of the Genuine Christian Doctrine*. To these publications, a reply was written in 1797, entitled, *Socinianism Indefensible, on the ground of its Moral Tendency*. Mr. Kentish wrote again, and Dr. Toulmin has lately published a second edition of his piece, with large additions. I had no inclination to add any thing in reply to Mr. Kentish, being well satisfied that the public should judge from the evidence that was before them. And as to Dr. Toulmin, his second edition is, like his first, full of irrelative matter.

Having been charged with *shifting the ground of the argument and begging the question*, this writer labours to persuade his readers that he has done neither. "He did not intend," he says, "nor profess, to give a *full* and *minute* answer to Mr Fuller's tract. He meant not *much more* than to take an *occasion* from that publication, to bring the general question, namely the practical efficacy of the Unitarian doctrine, to the test of scriptural facts."* This is acknowledging, that *if he had* professed to give a proper answer to the work, he would have been obliged by the laws of just reasoning, to keep to the ground of his opponent. But intending only to write a piece that should bear some *allusion* to it, he considered himself a liberty to choose his own ground. But if this were his intention, Why did he profess, at his outset, to "enter the lists" with me; and to comprehend in his performance "the main point to which a reply to my Letters need be directed?" If this be not professing to answer a work, nothing is.

* Practical Efficacy. p. 133. Second Edition.

The design of Mr. Toulmin seems to have been very complex, and his account of it has much the appearance of the evasion. He did not intend to give a *full* and *minute* answer: did he mean to give *any* answer; or only to write a piece which might *pass for an answer?* He meant not *much more* than thus and thus: Did he mean *any* more? If he did, he ought to have kept to the proper ground of reasoning; or, if he thought it unfair, to have proved it so.

But he had a right, he says, to choose the ground of his argument, as well as I. Doubtless, if he had chosen to write upon any subject, *without professing to answer another*, or wishing his performance to pass for an answer, he had: but if at the outset, he propose to "enter the lists" with an opponent, and to comprehend "all that to which a reply to his performance need be directed," it is otherwise. If a Christian divine wish to write in favour of Christianity, he is at liberty to choose his ground. He may fix as Bishop Newton has, on the argument from *prophecy*. But if a Deist come after him, professing to "enter the list," with him, and to comprehend in his performance "all that to which a reply to the work of his opponent need be directed," he is obliged by the rules of just reasoning, either to examine the arguments of his adversary, or attempt to overturn the principle on which they rest. If, instead of trying the truth of the Christian religion by the fulfilment of *prophecy*, he were to fill up his pages by arguing on the improbability of *miracles*, or *the sufficiency of the light of nature*. What would Dr. Toulmin say to him? And if, in order to excuse himself, he should allege, that he did not intend, nor profess, to give a *full* and *minute* answer to his antagonist; that he meant not *much more* than to take an *occasion* from his publication, to bring forward the general question between Christians and Deists, on the necessity of a divine revelation, might he not better have held his peace? Must not judicious persons, even amongst his friends, clearly perceive that he has betrayed the cause; and, whether they choose to acknowledge it, or not, be fully convinced that if he did not wish to answer the work, he should have let it alone; or if the ground of argument were unfair, he should, have

proved it so, and not have set up another, which had no relation to it?

Thus it is, that Dr. Toulmin has *shifted the ground of the argument:* and what is that ground to which he gives the preference? He wished, it seems, to try "the practical efficacy of the Unitarian doctrine, by the test of scriptural fact." Are those facts, then, a proper medium for such a trial? I have been used to think, that every tree was to be tried by its *own* fruits, and not by those of another. *Scriptural facts*, such as those which Dr. Toulmin alleges, afford a proper test of the practical efficacy of *scripture doctrines;* and, if brought against the cause of Infidelity, would be in point. But there is no question in this case, whether scripture truth be of a practical nature, but wherein it consists? The *facts* to which Dr. Toulmin wishes to draw the reader's attention, prove nothing in favor of Unitarianism or Trinitarianism: for, before they can be brought to bear, the work of proof must be accomplished by other means. An attempt to establish the practical efficacy of modern Unitarianism by scriptural facts, is like producing the fruits of Palestine, in order to ascertain the soil of Taunton.

Dr. Toulmin complained of my animadverting upon particular passages in the writings of Unitarians, and suggested that I ought rather to have applied my arguments to the general, the fundamental principles of their system; "That there is *one* God, the Father, and one Mediator between God and man, the *man* Christ Jesus." To this it was answered, "The unity of God, and the humanity of Christ, then, it seems, are the principles which I ought to have attacked; that is, I ought to have attacked principles which I profess to believe, and not those which I profess to disbelieve." —"But," says Dr. T. in reply, "does he receive these priciples in the *pure and simple form* in which Unitarians embrace them?"*

The Doctor ought to have expressed his fundamental principles *in his own words*, and not in those of scripture. Every controversial writer, who does not wish to beg the question, will do so. He ought to have said, Mr. Fuller, instead of animadverting upon particular passages in the writings of Unitarians, should have attacked

* Page 81. Note.

their first principles; That God is *one person*, and that Christ is *merely a man*. This had been fair and open: and had the objection been made in this form, I might have replied to this effect:—My object was not to attack particular principles, so much as the general tendency of their religion, taken in the gross; and the passages on which I animadverted, chiefly related to this view of the subject. Yet, in the course of the work, I have certainly attempted to prove *the divinity of Christ;* and whatever goes to establish this doctrine, goes to demolish those leading principles which, it is said, I ought to have attacked; for, if Christ be God, he cannot be *merely* a man, and there must be more than *one person* in the Godhead. But, not contented with expressing his leading principles in his own words, Dr. Toulmin chooses scripture language for the purpose. This, I contended, was begging the question; or, taking it for granted, that the terms *one God*, in scripture, mean *one person*, and that Christ's being called *a man*, denotes that he was *merely* a man. To show the impropriety of this proceeding, I alleged, that I believed both the unity of God, and the humanity of Christ; and, therefore, ought not to be expected to oppose either of them. "But does he receive these principles," says Dr. T. "in the *pure and simple form* in which Unitarians embrace them?" What is this but saying, that I do not admit the Socinian *gloss* upon the Apostle's words? Dr. Toulmin may contend, that the scriptures express his sentiments so plainly as to need no gloss; but a gloss it manifestly is. He may call it *a pure and simple form*, or what he pleases; but nothing is meant by it beyond a gloss, nor proved, except the prevalence of his easy-besetting sin, that of begging the question.

To show, in a still stronger light, the unfairness of a controversial writer's attempting to shroud his opinions under the phraseology of scripture, I supposed it to have been done by a Calvinist, and asked what Dr. Toulmin would say to it in that case? I could say for example, *There is a Father, a Son, and a Holy Spirit*, in whose name we are baptised. *The Word was God.—Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures;* and could require Socinians not to animadvert upon particular passages in Calvinistic writers, but on these *our leading principles.* Would they admit, or ought they

to be expected to admit of these, as our leading principles? No: Dr. Toulmin has given proof that he does not, and has thereby justified me in refusing to admit the same thing on his side of the question. He will not allow that our leading principles are expressed by these passages of scripture, because they say nothing of the Father, Son, and Spirit being *one God,* nor of a *sameness of essence*, &c. &c.* Very well: neither do I allow, that his leading principles are expressed by the passages he has produced; for they say nothing of God's being *one person*, or of Christ's being *merely* a man. If the scriptures which I alleged, express my sentiments *as fully* as the passages he has produced express his, that is sufficient. My object was not to join issue in endeavoring to prove that my sentiments were expressly and fully contained in scripture-language; but to show the futility of such pretences on either side. So far from "affecting to show, that the first principles of the Calvinists are to be expressed in the words of scripture," it was manifestly my design to show, that the practice of so expressing them *in controversy*, was objectionable, in that it takes for granted that which requires to be proved.

It is true, as Dr. Toulmin says, that, if he, or any other person, were to offer to subscribe the passages which I have produced, as exhibiting a creed tantamount to ours, we should demur to admit it in this view. But this, instead of overturning my reasoning, confirms it, and cuts the throat of his own argument: for it is no less true, that, if I, or any other person, were to offer to subscribe the passages produced by him, as exhibiting a creed tantamount to his, he would demur to admit it in this view. Nay, more: in his case, it is beyond supposition. I have actually offered to subscribe the Apostle's words, and he has actually refused to admit my subscription; alleging that I do not receive them in that *pure and simple form* in which Unitarians embrace them. According to his own reasoning, therefore, the words of the Apostle, by which he would express his leading principles, do not contain the *whole* of them, and he must have failed in his attempt to express them in scripture-language; and, consequently, the "boasted superiority" of his scheme, even in this respect, is without foundation.

Pages 5, 6. Note.

If we can believe Dr. Toulmin, however, the scriptures not only expressly declare God to be one, but *one person.* "This simple idea of God that he is one single person," says he, from Mr. Lindsey, "literally pervades every passage of the sacred volumes." To this I have answered, among other things, "It might have served a better purpose, if, instead of this general assertion, these gentlemen had pointed us to *a single* instance in which the unity of God is literally declared to be personal." And what has Dr. Toulmin said in reply? "The appeal, one would think, might be made to Mr. Fuller's own good sense. What can be more decisive instances of this, than the many passages in which the singular personal pronouns, and their correlates, are used concerning the Supreme Being; as, *I, me, my, mine,* &c."* Whatever may be thought of my good sense, or of that of my opponent, I appeal to good sense itself, whether he have made good his assertion. To say nothing of his reducing it from *every passage* to *many* passages, which probably strikes out ninety-nine passages out of a hundred in the sacred volumes; if the singular personal pronouns be a literal declaration, that God is one person, the plural personal pronouns, *Let* US *make man in* OUR *image,* &c. must equally be a literal declaration, that he is more than one. The singular personal pronouns also, which are frequently applied to the Holy Spirit,† contain a decisive proof, yea, a literal declaration of his personality; and which inevitably draws after it the doctrine of the Trinity.

Dr. Toulmin has said much about *judging the heart*: (pp. 95—101, Note :) but his objection does not seem to lie against judging, so much as judging Unitarians. If I affirm, what the scriptures uniformly teach, ‡ That a false and immoral system has its origin not in simple mistake, but in disaffection to God,§ this is highly presumptuous; this is judging the heart: but, if Dr. Toulmin

* Page 35, Note. † John xiv. 26. xv. 26. xvi. 7—15. 1 Cor. xii. 11.

‡ 1 Thess. ii. 10, 11. 2 Pet. ii. 1. 1 John iv. 6. Jude 4.

§ The reader will recollect, that what is affirmed at the close of the Letters is merely hypothetical, and rests upon the supposition of Socinianism being what I had attempted to prove it, a false and immoral system.

pronounce my mode of arguing to be "savouring of spleen and ill-nature, and evidently *designed* to fix an opprobrium and disgrace," (p. 134.) the case is altered.

It is right to judge of the disposition of the heart by "overt acts;" that is, by words and deeds: but, where this judgment is directed against Unitarians, it is not right, after all; for it is possible we may judge uncandidly and unjustly! It is right for Dr. T. to disregard the profession of his opponent, when he declares his belief in the unity of God and the humanity of Christ, and expresses that belief in the words of scripture, because he does not "receive these principles in *the pure and simple form* in which Unitarians embrace them." But, if we disregard *their* professions, and require any thing more than a declaration of their faith in the words of scripture, we set up "*our* gospel, or the gospel according to *our views* of it;" and act contrary to our professed principles as Protestants, as Dissenters, and as Baptists.

When our creed and worship are such, that they cannot conscientiously join them, they have a right to separate from us; otherwise they could not "keep the commandments of Jesus pure and undefiled:" but, whatever be their creed, or the tenor of their conversation, or prayers, we have no right to refuse communion with them.

If we do not model our professions, preaching, and worship, so as to give no offence to an individual of their principles, we "assume a power which no Christian, or body of Christians possesses:" yet they do not model their professions, preaching, or worship, so as to give no offence to us; neither do we desire they should. They do not confine themselves to the words of scripture; nor is it necessary they should. They inquire, whether our professions accord with the *meaning* of scripture; and we claim to do the same. The reason why Dr. T. will not allow of this and other claims, must, I should think, be this: Their views of the gospel are "*pure* and *simple*." and ours are *corrupt*. Thus it is, reader, that he goes about to prove, that he does not "take for granted the principles on which he argues," and that "he assumes nothing!" If Dr. T. can persuade himself and his friends, that he has not shifted the

ground of the argument, has not assumed what he should have proved, and, in short, has not tacitly acknowledged Socinianism to be indefensible on the ground of its moral tendency, they are welcome to all the consolation such a persuasion will afford them.

All I shall add will be, a brief defence of the *principle* on which the foregoing Letters are written. To undermine this, is a point at which all my opponents have aimed. The practical efficacy of doctrine, *in the present age*, is a subject, it seems, which ought not to be discussed, as the test of its being true. They are, to a man, however, against it: a pretty clear evidence this, that it does not speak good concerning them.

Mr. Belsham, in his *Review of Mr. Wilberforce*, glancing at *The Systems Compared*, says, "The amount of it is; We Calvinists, being much better Christians than you Socinians, our doctrines must, of course, be true." The Unitarians," he adds, "will not trespass upon the holy ground. We have learned, that *not he who commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.* And be it known to Mr. Wilberforce, and to all who, like him, are disposed to condemn their brethren unheard, that, if the Unitarians were inclined to boast, they have whereof to glory. And, if they took pleasure in exposing the faults of their orthodox brethren, they likewise have tales to unfold, which would reflect little credit on the parties, or on their principles. But of such mutual reproaches there would be no end."*

Dr. Toulmin alleges, that "It is a mode of arguing very unfavourable to *candour* and fair discussion, savouring of *spleen* and *ill-nature*, principally calculated to *misrepresent* and *irritate*, and evidently designed to fix an opprobrium and disgrace; that, when our Saviour cautioned his followers to *beware of false prophets*, who should be *known by their fruits*, he meant not persons who would teach *false doctrine*, and whose lives would accord with it; but persons of insincere *character*, whose doctrine might, nevertheless, be true; and that his brethren have not reasoned against Calvinism from the immoral *lives* of Calvinists, but merely from the immoral *tendency* of their principles.†

* Pages 267, 268, 274. † Pages 134, 148, 154.

If the mode of arguing pursued in the foregoing Letters be liable to all these objections, it is rather singular, that it should not have been objected to, till it was pointed against Socinianism. If it can be shown to be a mode of arguing consonant to the directions given by our Saviour, and actually used by the Apostles, the Fathers, the Reformers, the Puritans, and even by our opponents themselves, their objecting to it in this instance will prove nothing, except it be the weakness of their cause.

Our Saviour warned his followers to *beware of false prophets*, and gave this direction concerning them: *Ye shall know them by their fruits.** This direction, founded in self-evident truth, and enforced by the Head of the Christian church, appeared to me to furnish a proper criterion by which to judge of the claims, if not of every particular opinion, yet of every *system* of opinions pretending to divine authority.

Mr. Kentish admitted, that "The effects produced by a doctrine was a proper criterion of its *value*, but not of its *truth*." But the value of a doctrine implies its truth. Falsehood is of no value: whatever proves a doctrine valuable, therefore, must prove it to be true.

Mr. Kentish further objects: "This celebrated saying of our Saviour is proposed as a test of *character*, and not as a criterion of *opinion*." To the same purpose Dr. Toulmin alleges, that "This is a rule given to judge, not concerning *principles* but *men;* not concerning the sentiments promulgated by them, but concerning their own characters and pretensions. The persons here pointed at are hypocrites and false prophets; such as would falsely pretend a commission from God. Their pretensions might be blended with a *true doctrine;* but their claims were founded in dissimulation. They would be discovered by their covetousness, love of gain, and lasciviousness." p. 148.

These writers are, in general, exceedingly averse from judging *men*, considering it as uncandid and presumptuous, and plead for confining all judgment to *things;* but, in this case, *things* themselves seem to be in danger; and therefore *men* are left to shift for themselves.

* Matt. vii. 15—20.

According to this exposition, it is the duty of Christians, when ministers discover an avaricious and ambitious disposition, though sound in doctrine, and in time past apparently humble and pious, to set them down as hypocrites. And this is more *candid*, it seems, and savours less of *spleen* and *ill-nature*, than drawing an unfavourable conclusion of their doctrinal principles.

But waving this: The saying of our Saviour is given as a test of *false* prophets, or teachers; an epithet never bestowed, I believe, on men whose doctrine was *true*. That false prophets and teachers were men of bad character, I admit, though that character was not always apparent:* but that they are ever so denominated on account of their character, as distinct from their doctrine, does not appear. When any thing is said of their doctrine, it is invariably described as false. *If any man shall say unto you, lo here, is Christ, or lo there,* BELIEVE HIM NOT: *for false Christs, and* FALSE PROPHETS, bearing witness in their favour, *shall arise.—There were* FALSE PROPHETS *among the people, even as there shall be* FALSE TEACHERS *among you who privily shall bring in* DAMNABLE HERESIES, *even* DENYING THE LORD THAT BOUGHT THEM, *and bring upon themselves swift destruction.—Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they be of God: because many* FALSE PROPHETS *are gone out into the world.—Every spirit that* CONFESSETH NOT THAT JESUS CHRIST IS COME IN THE FLESH, *is not of God.—Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the* DOCTRINE OF CHRIST, *hath not God. If there come any unto you, and bring not* THIS DOCTRINE, *receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed, is partaker of his evil deeds.*†

If the *false prophets* described by our Saviour were such as might teach "a true doctrine," the description given by the New Testament writers, uniformly representing them as teaching falsehood, are at variance with those of their Master.

That there were hypocrites who taught a true doctrine, may be allowed: but they are never denominated *false prophets* or *false teachers*. Balaam was a wicked character, and is called *a prophet;*

* 2 Cor. xi. 14. Matt. vii. 15.

† Mark xiii. 21, 23. 2 Pet. ii. 1. 1 John iv. 1—3. 2 John 10, 11.

but, as the subject matter of his prophecies were true, he is not called a *false prophet.* Judas also, was a hypocrite and a thief, at the same time that he was a preacher and an apostle; but, as what he taught was true, he is not described as a *false* teacher, or a *false* apostle.

These things considered, let the impartial reader determine, Whether our Saviour did not mean to direct his followers to judge by their fruits, *who were the patrons of false doctrine?*

With respect to the *use* which has been made of this direction, I appeal, in the first place, to the *apostles* and New-testament writers. I presume they will not be accused of self-commendation, nor of spleen, and ill-nature; yet they scrupled not to represent those who believed their doctrine, as *washed* and *sanctified* from their former immoralities; and those who believed it not, as *having pleasure in unrighteousness.** All those *facts* which Dr. Toulmin has endeavoured to press into the service of modern Unitarianism, are evidences of the truth of the primitive doctrine, and were considered as such by the New-testament writers. They appealed to the effects produced in the lives of believers, as *living epistles, known and read of all men*, in proof that they *had not corrupted the word of God*, but were the true ministers of Christ.† With the fullest confidence they asked, *Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?*‡ Plainly intimating, that truth was well known by its effects. Nor was error less so: those who introduced false doctrines, are invariably described as unholy characters.§

To quote the reasonings of the *Fathers* on this principle, were to copy a large proportion of their *apologies.* I question whether there be one of them, which does not contain arguments for the truth of Christianity, on the ground of the holy lives of Christians; and which does not infer, or, in some form, intimate, the falsehood of Heathenism, from the known immorality of Heathens. Their opponents having no better answer at hand, might possibly charge this reasoning with vain boasting, spleen and ill-nature: but I do

*1 Cor. vi. 9—11. 2 Thes. ii. 12. †2 Cor ii. 17. iii. 1—3.

‡1 John v. 5. §2 Pet. ii. 1—3. Jude. 1 Cor. xv. 33, 34.

not recollect that it was ever imputed to these causes by Christians.

As to the *Reformers*, the most successful attacks which they made upon the Church of Rome, were founded on the dissolute lives of her Clergy, and the holiness and constancy of those whom she persecuted unto death. The general strain of their writings may be seen in Fox's Martyrology, which is, in effect, an exhibition of the moral character of the persecutors and the persecuted, from which the world is left to judge which was the true religion: and I may add, a considerable part of the world did judge, and acted accordingly.

Dr. Toulmin suggests from *Mosheim*, that the Reformers, and particularly Calvin and his associates, neglected the science of morals.* But Mosheim's prejudice against Calvin and his associates, renders his testimony of but little weight, especially as the reader may satisfy himself of the contrary by the writings of the parties, which are yet extant. The eighth chapter of the second book of *Calvin's Institutes*, is sufficient to wipe away this slander. The morality there inculcated, is such as neither Antinomians, nor "great numbers" amongst modern Unitarians, can endure. That there were some among the *gospellers*, as they were called, who were loose characters, is admitted: such there are in every age: but take the reformed as a body, and they were not only better Christians than their persecutors, but, than those their successors, who, while pretending to teach the "science" of morality, have deserted the great principles by which it requires to be animated, and debased it, by allowing the amusements of the theatre, and other species of dissipation, to be consistent with it.

The historian of the *puritans* has recorded of that persecuted people, that, "While others were at plays and interludes, at revels, or walking in the fields, or at the diversions of bowling, fencing, &c. on the evening of the sabbath, they, with their families, were employed in reading the scriptures, singing psalms, catechising their children, repeating sermons, and prayer; that neither was this confined to the Lord's day, but they had their hours of family devotion on the week days, esteeming it their duty to take care of the souls as well as of the bodies of their servants; and that they

* Page 109.

were circumspect as to all the excesses of eating and drinking, apparel, and lawful diversions; being frugal in house keeping, industrious in their particular callings, honest and exact in their dealings, and solicitous to give to every one his own."*

These things might not be alleged in proof of the truth of every particular opinion which they held; neither have I inferred from such premises, the truth of every opinion maintained by Calvinists; but they were alleged in proof that their religion, in the main, *was that of Jesus Christ*, and the religion of their adversaries, *a very near approach to that of Antichrist.* Nor do I recollect that the writer has been charged, unless it be by those who felt the condemnation which his story implied, with vain-boasting, spleen, or ill-nature.

Finally: Will our opponents accuse *themselves* of these evils, for having reasoned upon this principle as far as they are able? That they have done this, is manifest, though Dr. Toulmin affects to disown it, alleging, that they have not reasoned on the *lives* of men, but merely on the *tendency* of principles.† That they have reasoned on the tendency of principles, is true; and so have I: such is the reasoning of the far greater part of the foregoing Letters. But that they avoided all reference to the *lives* of Calvinists, is not true. Was it on the tendency of principles, or on the lives of men, that Dr. Priestley reasoned, when he compared the *virtue* of Trinitarians with that of Unitarians, allowing, that though the latter had more of an apparent conformity to the world than the former, yet, upon the whole, they approached nearer to the proper temper of Christianity than they?‡ Did he confine himself to the tendency of principles, in what he has related of Mr. Bodcock?§ Does he not refer to the *practices* of Antinomians, in proof of the immoral tendency of Calvinism, representing them as the legitimate offspring of our principles?‖

* Neale's History of the Puritans, Vol. I. Chap. VIII. † Page 110.

‡ Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 100.

§ Familiar Letters, *Letter* XXII.

‖ See the quotation, p. 77, of the foregoing Letters.

And though Mr. Belsham now affects to be disgusted with this mode of reasoning, yet there was a time when he seemed to think it would be of service to him, and when he figured away in the use of it. Did he not affirm, that "they who were sincerely pious, and diffusively benevolent with our principles, could not have failed to have been much *better*, and much *happier*, had they adopted a milder, a more rational, a more truly evangelical creed?" And what is this but affirming, that those of his sentiments are *better* and *happier*, in general, than others?

Yet this gentleman affects to despise the foregoing Letters; for, that the sum of them is, "We Calvinists being much better Christians than you Socinians, our doctrines must, of course, be true."* Strange, that a writer should so far forget himself, as to reproach the performance of another, for that which is the characteristic of his own!

Nor is this all: In the small compass of the same discourse, he expresses a hope, that Socinian converts would "at length feel the benign influence of their principles, and *demonstrate the excellence of their faith, by the superior dignity and worth of their character.*" If the excellence of principles (and of course their truth, for nothing can be excellent which is not true,) be not domonstrable by the character of those who embrace them, How is superior dignity and worth of character to demonstrate it?

Such was once the "self condemning" language of Mr. Belsham: but, whether his converts have disappointed his hope, or whether the ground be too "holy" for him, so it is, that he is now entirely of a different mind: and, what is worse, would fain persuade his readers, that it is ground on which he and his brethren have never "trespassed."

This is the man, who, after throwing down the gauntlet, declines the contest; and, after his partisans have laboured to the utmost to maintain their cause, talks of what they *could say, and do*, were they not withheld by motives of generosity!

One would imagine, from Mr. Belsham's manner of writing, that I had dealt largely in *tales* of private characters. The truth is,

* Review of Mr. Wilberforce, p. 274.

What tales have been told are of their own telling. I freely acknowledged, that "I was not sufficiently acquainted with the bulk of Socinians, to judge of their moral character."* Every thing was rested on their own concessions: and this it is which is the galling circumstance to Mr. Belsham and his party. They may now insinuate what great things they *could* bring forward to our disadvantage, were they not restrained by motives of modesty and generosity: but they can do nothing. They might, indeed, collect tales of individuals, and point out many faults which attach to the general body: but they cannot prove it to be equally immoral with the general body of Socinians. Before this can be consistently attempted, they must retract their concessions: and this will not avail them; for it must be manifest to all men, that it was only to answer an end.

The reader is now left to judge for himself, whether the principle of reasoning adopted in the foregoing Letters, be justly liable to the objections which have been raised against it; whether our opponents did not first apply it against us; and whether any other reason can be given for their present aversion from it, than that they feel it to be unfavourable to their cause.

A. F

* See Page 126 of these Letters.

SOCINIANISM

INDEFENSIBLE

ON THE

GROUND OF ITS MORAL TENDENCY:

CONTAINING

A REPLY

TO TWO LATE PUBLICATIONS;

THE ONE, BY DR. TOULMIN,

ENTITLED,

THE PRACTICAL EFFICACY OF THE UNITARIAN DOCTRINE CONSIDERED;

THE OTHER, BY MR. KENTISH,

ENTITLED,

THE MORAL TENDENCY OF THE GENUINE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE;

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INTRODUCTION.

IT is now more than three years since the first publication of *The Calvinistic and Socinian Systems examined and compared, as to their Moral Tendency.* Dr. Toulmin expresses some regret, that, at the time he wrote, nothing had appeared in answer to it; and seems disposed to account for this circumstance in a way that may acquit his cause of seeming to be indefensible. Addressing himself to me, he says, "No one can doubt, that the gentleman, on passages in whose writings many of your reflections are grounded, are every way equal to the contest, if they saw fit to enter the lists with you. As they have not done it, I presume they think it sufficient to leave the candid reader to judge between you and them." (p. 2.)

That these gentlemen, so far as abilities are concerned, are equal to this contest, there can, indeed, be no doubt: but, whether they be *every way* equal to it, is another question. It is beyond the power of any man to convert truth into falsehood, or falsehood into truth; and their silence may, for any thing Dr. Toulmin can prove, be owing to the difficulty of the undertaking. One thing is rather remarkable: though Dr. Toulmin has undertaken a defence of Socinianism, yet he has cautiously avoided a vindication of the writings of those gentlemen, on which I had animadverted. Such a conduct could not have been pursued by them: if they had written, they must have entered on a defence of their writings, or have given them up as indefensible.

Dr. Toulmin informs us, that, for his own part, "it was but lately that the piece fell in his way, so as to find him at leisure to read it." (p. 1.) This, undoubtedly, is a sufficient apology, so far as it respects himself; and if he or his colleague, Mr. Kentish, have but overturned the substance of the piece against which they have written, time and other circumstances are of small account. If the

opinion of *Reviewers*, on these performances, be of any weight, it must be concluded, that they have done this, at least. *The Analytical* and *Monthly Reviews*, with *The Protestant Dissenters' Magazine*, have each bestowed on one or other of them, their strong and unqualified approbation. Whether their critiques have been of any advantage to the cause I may hereafter inquire : at present, I shall proceed to examine what is advanced by each of my opponents, in their order.

1797

A

REPLY TO DR. TOULMIN.

SECTION I.

ON THE GROUND OF ARGUMENT USED IN THIS CONTROVERSY, AND THE ATTEMPTS OF OUR OPPONENTS TO SHIFT IT.

When I first formed a design of writing against Socinianism, I perceived, that, although the holy scriptures were treated, by Socinian writers, with great disrespect in various instances, yet they were generally the ultimate tribunal to which the appeal was made. The object of the controversy, on both sides, seemed to be to ascertain their *true meaning*. For this purpose, two general methods had been adopted: First, arranging the various passages of scripture which relate to the subject, and reasoning upon them. Secondly, examining in what sense Christians, in the early ages of Christianity, understood them.

The first is the common way of deciding controversies in divinity; and a very good way it is, if fairly conducted. I had several objections, however, against pursuing it in this instance. First: it was ground which was already fully occupied. Able writers, on both sides, had gone over all the passages of scripture relating to the subject; and many of them had nearly exhausted their genius, in reasoning upon the scope of the sacred writers, and in criticising upon the original language. Secondly: I perceived that Socinian writers had got into such an unwarrantable habit of criticising upon the sacred writings, that the plainest passages

could not stand before them; whole chapters, and whole books, were cashiered, as spurious; and even the whole Bible was declared to be "obscure," and "never designed to decide upon controverted questions in religion and morality."* It appeared, to me, of but little account to reason upon texts of scripture, when the scripture itself, whatever might be its meaning, was virtually disallowed.

As to the last of these methods, it was not within my province. Besides, it appeared to me, that, whatever pleasure we may feel in tracing the history of early opinions, and whatever good purposes may be answered by a work of this nature, if impartially conducted; yet it can afford no proper criterion of what is the apostolic doctrine. Christians in early ages were as liable to err as we are; and, in many instances, they did err, so as to contradict the scriptures, and one another.

Thinking on these things, it occurred to me, that there was another method of reasoning, distinct from those which have been already mentioned; namely, by inquiring—*What is that doctrine, in the present day, which is productive of the best moral effects?* Several considerations induced me to prefer this ground of reasoning, in the present case, to either of the other two. First; It would serve to ascertain what was the apostolic doctrine, as well as the former of them, and much better than the latter. If, for example, in discoursing on the vines and fig-trees which formerly grew in the land of Canaan, a dispute should arise, whether they resembled this or that species now growing in other countries, one way of deciding it would be to compare the fruits. If the fruit of one species could be proved to possess a much nearer likeness than the fruit of another, that would tend to decide the controversy in its favour. Secondly: An inquiry into the moral tendency of the different doctrines, would not only serve as a medium of ascertaining which of them was the apostolic doctrine, but would also prove *the truth of that doctrine*, and its *divine original*: for it is a principle so deeply engraven on the human mind, that whatever doctrine is productive of good fruits must in itself be

* Monthly Review Enlarged, Vol. X. p. 357.

good, and have its origin in God, that very few writers, if any would dare to maintain the contrary. I perceived, therefore, if I could not only prove that what is commonly called Calvinism is most productive of effects similar to those which sprang from the doctrine of the Apostles, but also exhibit them in such a light, as I went along, as that they should approve themselves to every man's conscience ; I should thereby cut off the retreat of those Socinian writers, who, when their doctrine is proved to be anti-scriptural, forsake Christian ground, and take shelter upon the territories of Deism ; degrading the Bible as an " obscure book ;" taxing its writers with " reasoning inconclusively ;" and declaring, that its " nature and design was not to settle disputed theories, or decide upon controverted questions in religion and morality." I knew well, that, though they dared to write degradingly of the scriptures, and of the sacred writers, yet they dare not professedly set themselves against morality. Thirdly : The judging of doctrines by their effects, is a practice warranted by scripture : *By their fruits ye shall know them.* A very able writer, in a discourse on this passage, has shown, that " the rule here given by our Saviour, is the best that could have been given ; that it is sufficient to distinguish truth from error ; and that it is, in fact, the rule by which all good men, and, indeed, mankind in general, do judge of religious principles and pretensions."* Fourthly, I supposed that such a method of reasoning would be more interesting to the public mind, having never before, to my recollection, been adopted as the ground of any particular treatise on the subject. Fifthly, It was ground upon which there was room for common Christians to stand, and be witnesses of the issue of the contest ; which, while the controversy turned upon the opinion of the Fathers, or the construction of a text of scripture, was not the case. Sixthly, It was a ground of reasoning to which our opponents could not fairly object, seeing they had commenced an attack upon it, charging the Calvinistic system with " gloominess," " bigotry," and " licentiousness ;" with being " averse to the love of both God and man," and " an axe at the root of all virtue."

* See Dr. Witherspoon's Trial of Religious Truth by its Moral Influence.

These were the principal reasons which induced me to prefer the ground of argument on which I have proceeded. I would not be understood, however, as expressing the least disrespect towards the works of those who have proceeded on other grounds. Let the subject be examined in every point of view. Every author has a right to choose his ground of reasoning, provided it be a fair one, and that which may be unsuitable to the turn and talents of one person, may be suitable to those of another. If the reader wish to see the present controversy pursued, on the grounds of scripture testimony, and the opinions of early ages, he may consult to great advantage, a late very valuable and elaborate work of Dr. Jamieson, entitled, *A Vindication of the Doctrine of Scripture, and of the Primitive Faith, concerning the Deity of Christ, in Reply to Dr. Priestley's History of Early Opinions*, 2 vols. 8vo.

Knowing somewhat of the abilities of the writers on the other side, and their readiness, on all occasions, to defend their cause, I did not expect to escape their censure. I laid my account, that what I advanced would either be treated as unworthy of notice, or if any answer was written, that the strength of the arguments, would be tried to the uttermost. In both these particulars, however, I have been mistaken. They have not treated it as unworthy of notice. They have acknowledged the contrary. And, as to trying the strength of the arguments, I must say, that Dr. Toulmin has not so much as looked them in the face. On the contrary, though *the Practical Efficacy of the Unitarian Doctrine*, is the title of his performance, yet he acknowledges his design is to "supercede the examination of that comparison into which I had fully entered;"* that is, to relinquish the defence of the practical efficacy of his principles, and to reason entirely upon another ground. Mr. Kentish is the only writer who has pretended to encounter the argument. Whether he has succeeded, will be hereafter examined. At present, I shall attend to Dr. Toulmin.

This writer observes, at the outset, that "the title prefixed to his Letters, will lead the reader to expect from them, chiefly the discussion of one point; but, that a point of great importance in

* Page 5.

itself, and the main one to which a reply to Mr. Fuller's work need to be directed."

Now, reader, what would you have expected that *one point* to be? The title prefixed to his Letters, recollect is this; *The practical Efficacy of the Unitarian Doctrine considered.* Would you not have supposed, that the Doctor was going to offer evidence in favour of the practical efficacy of *modern* Unitarianism? From the title of his book, could you have expected any other than an exhibition of the most forcible *arguments* in favour of the holy tendency of his principles, together with a number of undoubted *facts* in which their efficacy has appeared, sufficient, at least, to confront the evidence alleged on the other side? How great then must be your disappointment, to find him employed in "producing evidence in support of his opinion, from *passages of scripture;*" and in proving what nobody calls in question, that the preaching of the apostle was productive of great moral effects?

Dr. Toulmin, it should seem, can find no such fruits of Socinian doctrines as will support an appeal, and therefore is under the necessity of going seventeen hundred years back, in search of examples. But are these examples in point: Were the principles of Christians, in the apostolic age, the same as those of Socinians? With what face can Dr. Toulmin *take it for granted* that they were, or even go about to *prove* it, as a medium of establishing the practical efficacy of modern Unitarianism?

When the grand end of a controversy is to determine a principle, a writer who assumes that principle as a medium of proof, is guilty of *begging the question:* and, if in order to escape the public censure, he endeavour to give evidence of this principle, from *some other source of argument* than that which he professes to answer, he is guilty of *shifting* the ground of the controversy; and by so doing, virtually gives up his cause as indefensible.

This is exactly the case with Dr. Toulmin. The Doctrine of the apostles is allowed, on both sides, to have produced great moral effects. The object of the controversy was to ascertain *what that doctrine was.* The medium of proof which I had adopted, and to which Dr. Toulmin, if he pretended to write an answer to me, ought to have confined himself, was the *effects* which it produced.

I attempted to prove that the apostolic and Calvinistic doctrines are nearly similar, from the similarity of their effects; and, that the apostolic and Socinian doctrines are dissimilar, from the dissimilarity of their effects. To have answered this reasoning, Dr. Toulmin should have proved, either that the effects of the Calvinistic doctrine are *not* similar to those which attended the doctrine of the apostles, and that the effects of the Socinian doctrine *are* so; or else, that a similarity of effects is not a proper ground from which to infer a similarity in the nature of the doctrines. His attempting to prove the practical efficacy of the Unitarian doctrine, by assuming that the apostles were Unitarians, in his sense of the term, is nothing better than *begging the question;* and his endeavouring to screen himself from this reproach, by labouring to prove the point in dispute from a review of the Acts of the Apostles, let his reasonings be ever so just, is foreign from the purpose: it is *shifting the ground of the argument:* it is declining to meet the inquiry on the ground of moral tendency, and substituting in its place, *observations on the meaning of scripture testimony:* which to all intents and purposes, is relinquishing the practical efficacy of modern Unitarianism, as indefensible. The plain language of his performance is this: There are no examples to be found of any considerable moral influence which the Unitarian doctrine has had upon the hearts and lives of men of late ages; and, therefore, I have had recourse to the preaching of the Apostles, and have endeavoured to prove, that they were Unitarians.

If Dr. Toulmin thought the moral tendency of a doctrine an improper medium of proof, why did he not professedly decline it? Why did he not acknowledge, that Dr. Priestley was wrong in challenging an inquiry on such a ground? And why did he entitle his performance, *The practical Efficacy of the Unitarian Doctrine?* This piece does not answer to its title: it ought rather, to have been called, *An Inquiry into the Doctrines which the Primitive Preachers delivered, by a Review of the Acts of the Apostles.* The practical efficacy of either doctrine makes no part of his argument, and occupies scarcely any place in his performance, except the title page; and there is reason to think, it would not have been

there, but for the sake of its wearing the *appearance* of an answer to the piece against which it is written.

I am not obliged by the laws of controversy to follow Dr. Toulmin in his review of the history of the Acts of the Apostles; nor is it my intention to be diverted from the subject by the manœuvres of any opponent. The only notice I shall take of this part of his performance will be in the form of an *Appendix*, as being a subject beside the question; and that, merely to show, as a thing by the bye, that, even upon his own ground, his cause is indefensible.

An anonymous writer, in the Analytical Review,* discovers a similar inclination with that of Dr. Toulmin, *to shift the ground of the controversy;* but with this difference: the Reviewer openly avows his dislike of the medium of proof which I have adopted; calling it "a fallacious test," and recommending to all parties, "instead of asking, *by whom* any system is professed, to confine themselves to the single inquiry, by *what evidence* it is supported: whereas Dr. Toulmin, though he discovers the same dislike to the ground of argument on which I have proceeded, yet has not the ingenuousness to acknowledge it, but *pretends* to reason upon the practical efficacy of his principles, while, in fact, he has utterly relinquished it, and endeavoured to establish his system upon another ground.

The writer above-mentioned, having quoted the concluding paragraph of my Letters, calls it "an unfounded and presumptuous sentence, pronounced upon the *hearts* of those who adopt Socinian principles," and insinuates, that I must have written in a *bad spirit*. Before I have finished these pages, I shall have occasion to defend the passage referred to, more particularly. At present, I only observe, that, taken in its connexion, it amounts to no more than this, That, *if* Socinianism be an immoral system, immoral dispositions are the avenues which lead to it: and it is possible, that this writer, notwithstanding what he has said under cover, might be ashamed to come forward, and, in a publication to which he should prefix his name, avow his denial of this proposition.

This Reviewer wishes to have it thought, that the moral effects

* Vol. XVII, pp. 183, 184.

produced by a doctrine form no part of the evidence by which it is supported; that is to say, he wishes to shift this ground of argument, as unsuitable to his purpose. If the effects of a doctrine upon the hearts and lives of men be no proper ground of argument, why are we directed by our Lord to judge of false teachers by their fruits? and why were not the same observations made, while Socinians were throwing out their accusations of immorality against the Calvinists? Writers may rave like furies against them, and be applauded by Socinian Reviewers.* But a single attempt to repel these shafts of calumny, and to *prove*, from facts which no one has yet undertaken to dispute, that immorality attaches to the other side, quite alters the nature of things: lo, then, the ground of argument is unfair, and the writer must be a man of a bad spirit!

About forty years ago, the Socinians, and those who veered towards their sentiments in the Church of Scotland, are said to have attacked the Calvinistic system with various kinds of weapons. Amongst others, they abounded in the use of ridicule; so much, indeed, that they seemed disposed to adopt Lord Shaftesbury's maxim, that "Ridicule is the test of truth." At this juncture, Dr. Witherspoon, as it is supposed, published his *Ecclesiastical Characteristics;* in which he successfully turned their weapon upon themselves. The effect of that performance was very considerable: a dead silence succeeded its publication; *none moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped;* but they comforted one another, by suggesting, that the author of the *Characteristics* must be *a man of a bad heart!*

* See Monthly Review, for July, 1792, on Llewellyn's Tracts, p. 226.

SECTION II.

CONTAINING FURTHER REMARKS ON DR. TOULMIN, WITH REPLIES TO VARIOUS OF HIS ANIMADVERSIONS.

Dr. Toulmin gives us, at the outset of his performance, a short account of the "fundamental principles" of his scheme. These, he tells us, are, "That there is but one *God*, the sole former, supporter, and governor of the universe, the only proper object of religious worship; and that there is but one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who was commissioned by God to instruct men in their duty, and to reveal the doctrine of a future life."* He afterwards complains, that, "instead of applying my arguments against these principles, I have brought forward particular positions, scattered through the works or discourses of several eminent persons, known and able advocates of the Unitarian faith, which have no immediate and direct connexion with the first principles of it." These positions, he observes, "might, or might not, be true; and the truth of the great doctrines of the unity of God and the humanity of Christ remain, in either case, unaffected by it."† The unity of God, and the humanity of Christ, then, it seems, are the principles which I ought to have attacked: that is to say, I ought to have attacked principles which I profess to believe, and not those which I profess to disbelieve! Dr. Toulmin seems disposed to be on the *safe* side. By avoiding a defence of those positions which are quoted from the principal writers of the party, and adopting the words of scripture as the medium by which to express his sentiments, (taking it for granted, as he goes along, that these scripture-expressions are to be understood in his sense of them,) his work becomes very easy, and very pleasant. But thinking people will remark, that, by so doing, he has retired from the field of controversy, and taken

* Page 4. † Page. 41.

refuge upon neutral ground. Dr. Toulmin knows that I shall not dispute with him the apostolic position, that *there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus:* and his taking it for granted, that these and other scriptures convey his peculiar sentiments; namely, that the unity of God is *personal*, and that Christ is *merely* a man, is *begging the question;* a practice to which he is more than a little addicted.

What would Dr. Toulmin have said, if I had alleged that Socinians, instead of attacking the positions of the leading writers amongst the Calvinists, ought to have attacked our first principles; such as the following: there is a *Father, a Son, and a Holy Spirit, in whose name we are baptized: the Word was God: Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures.* And, if to this I had added, "We think it a just ground of boast, that we can express our fundamental opinions in the *words* of scripture;"* would he not have replied, to this effect? 'We do not deny any one of your positions. These are not your distinguishing principles, but are such as are allowed on both sides. *It is the sense which you put upon these passages of scripture*, which constitutes your first principles, and the points of difference between us. You ought not to expect, that we should attack the words of scripture; for it is not scripture, but your *glosses* upon it, that we oppose; and it is mean in you to *beg the question*, by taking it for granted that your sense of these passages is the true one; it is no other than shrouding your obnoxious glosses under the sacred phraseology of scripture; and it betrays an inclination in you to impose upon us the one, under the form of the other.'

No man who striveth for the mastery, is crowned, except he strive lawfully. If a Grecian combatant had quitted the ground marked out for the contest, like Dr. Toulmin, he would not only have lost the prize, but would have been struck out of the list of honorable competitors.

Dr. Toulmin labors to prove, that there are certain principles that are productive of piety, which are not peculiar to Calvinists or Socinians, but are common to both; and mentions several devotional trea-

* Page 5.

tises of Calvinistic writers, in which these are the only principles insisted on.* And what if this be granted? I never said, that the distinguishing principles of Calvinism were the *only* sources of holy practice. On the contrary, the being of a God, which we hold in common with the Deists, is the foundation-stone in the great fabric of piety and virtue. This, however, I must observe: that the most important truths, when accompanied with great errors, are retained to but very little purpose, in comparison of what they are when accompanied with other truths. Divine truths, in this respect, resemble divine precepts: they are so connected together, that he who offends in one point is, as it were, guilty of all. It is thus that one great truth, the being of a God, is of but very little use to Deists who reject his word: and I may add, it is thus that the doctrine of a future life loses almost all its effect in the hands of both Deists and Socinians. Dr. Toulmin will admit the propriety of this remark, as it respects the former:† and if Dr. Priestley's *Sermon on the Death of Mr. Robinson* may be considered as a specimen of the Socinian doctrine of a future life, there can be but little doubt of the latter.‡

In introducing the above remarks, Dr. Toulmin tells us his design is to prove, "that the Calvinistic system is not essential to devotion."§ Truly, our opponents are, of late, become moderate in their demands. Heretofore, Calvinism was "unfriendly to the love both of God and man, and an axe at the root of all virtue:" but now, it seems, it is allowed to have a tendency in favor of devotion, and all that is argued for, is, that it is "*not essential*" to it.

After holding up the character of several Socinians, as eminent for piety and virtue, Dr. Toulmin observes, that, "if the number of excellent characters should not be so great as amongst other denominations—a cause of this is easily to be assigned: the number

* Pages 33, 34.

† See his Dissertation on the Internal Evidences and Excellences of Christianity, p. 246, Note.

‡ See reflections upon it, near the end of my XIVth Letter on Socinianism.

§ Page 35.

of Socinians hath always, in the later ages of the church, borne a small proportion to the number of Trinitarians and Calvinists; and the number of sincere, conscientious persons, attentive to the cultivation of pious affections, hath borne a small proportion to those who have been nominal Socinians or Calvinists."* It was no part of my plan to examine the good or bad conduct of individuals, whether they were Socinians or Calvinists: it was the *general body* from which I proposed to form an estimate.

As to Dr. Toulmin's attempt to reduce the state of Socinians and Calvinists to a level, it comes too late. His brethren have acknowledged that, "Rational Christians are often represented as indifferent to practical religion:" nor have they denied the charge, or alleged that they are no more so than is common with other denominations of Christians; but, on the contrary, have tacitly admitted it, by endeavoring to *account* for it. Nay, why need I go back to the acknowledgments of Mr. Belsham or Dr. Priestley?—Dr. Toulmin, himself has, in effect, acknowledged the same thing: he also goes about to *account* for the defect in devotion among Socinians, compared with Calvinists, in such a way as shall not be disparaging to the principles of the former, with respect to their influence on the pious feelings. "They," he says, "deeply engaged in the investigation of truth, absorbed in gaining just ideas, may have been necessarily betrayed into a neglect of the culture of the heart and affections."† These methods of *accounting* for things, whether just or not, are plain indications of *the existence of the fact* accounted for: all attempts, therefore, to disown or palliate it, are nugatory and vain.

But let us examine Dr. Toulmin's method of accounting for the defect of devotion among Socinians. They are so absorbed in the acquisition of truth, as to neglect the culture of the heart; yea, necessarily to neglect it. This is somewhat strange. Truth and righteousness used to be reckoned friendly to each other; but, of late, it seems, the case is altered. Dr Priestley and Mr. Belsham have taught us, that *indifference to religion is friendly to the acquisition of truth;* and Dr. Toulmin completes the scheme, by teaching

* Page 36. † Ibid.

us, that *the acquisition of truth is friendly to indifference to religion;* or, which is the same thing, that *it leads to the neglect of cultivating holy affections.* Say, reader, can that be *truth, evangelical truth,* which is thus acquired, and which thus operates? The knowledge of Christ's doctrine was formerly promoted by *doing his will;* and being known, it invariably wrought in a way of righteousness.

I know, indeed, that persons deeply engaged in *polemics,* whatever cause they espouse, are in danger of neglecting the culture of the heart: but, whatever allowances require to be made on one side of the controversy, ought equally to be made on the other.—Unless Dr. Toulmin means to acknowledge, that, on account of the peculiar difficulty of defending their cause, they have had greater labor, and more "absorbing" application than their opponents, he cannot, therefore, account for their defects from their *polemical* engagements. The "investigation" to which he refers, must be *private,* like that of the noble Bereans; but serious investigation of divine truth has not been used to produce the effect which Dr. Toulmin ascribes to it, but the reverse. The deeper the primitive christians drank into it, the more powerfully it operated; *changing them into the same image from glory to glory, by the Spirit of God. Grace and peace* were *multiplied in them* by *the knowledge of God, and of Jesus,* their *Lord.* What strange fatality is it that hangs about Socinianism? It seems doomed to die by its own hands!

That Dr. Toulmin's sentiments have produced glorious effects in turning sinners to righteousness, is manifest, if he may but take for granted, or be allowed to have proved, that these were the sentiments of the apostles: but, if this be not allowed him, and he be asked for proof of any such effects arising from Socinianism, or, as he would call it, modern Unitarianism, here he scarcely pretends to any thing of the kind. He endeavours, however, to account for the contrary, from "circumstances not included in the nature of the doctrine, or its inefficiency." "There are times," he observes, "in which men hear not Moses and the prophets.—The flock of Christ, while he was upon earth, was a little flock.—He lamented the unsuccessfulness of his own preaching; and the

preaching of the apostles was not always successful."* All this is true, and proves, that the success of any doctrine depends upon something else than merely its being adapted to the end. But, can it be said of the apostles' doctrine, that *there never was a time in which it was remarkably blessed to the conversion of sinners?* Dr. Toulmin admits the contrary: but to what period will he refer us, when Socinianism was productive of such effects? If the doctrine of our opponents be the same, for substance, as that of the scriptures, is it not surprising, that, ever since the times of the apostles, "circumstances," should have existed to counteract its efficacy? or, if this were admissible, is it not still more surprising, that those very effects should, since that time, have been transferred to a false doctrine, a mere corruption of Christianity?

But "the unsuccessfulness," it is pleaded, "may, in some degree, be imputed to the conduct of those who, instead of refuting their doctrine by plain, scriptural, and sound argument, give representations of it that are invidious, raise prejudices against it, and prevent its having a fair hearing." A part of this charge is exhibited against me, for representing their "congregations as gradually dwindling away, their principles as having nothing in them, comparatively speaking, to alarm the conscience, or interest the heart; and their sincerity, zeal, and devotion, as on a footing with those of Saul the persecutor."† As to the *last* of these representations, the whole of which I have suggested is, to prove, that a species of devotion may exist which is anti-evangelical; and therefore, that the mere existence of devotion, irrespective of its nature and effects, is no evidence in favour of the principles from which it arises. And, as the whole of them, the only question is, whether they be true? If I have given false and invidious representations, they are capable of being proved such; and, if the arguments which I have used be not plain, sound, and scriptural, they are the more easily overturned. It is rather singular, however, that those facts which I alleged to have existed *at the time I wrote*, should be attributed, in any degree, to me. And why have not the same effects been produced upon Calvinistic congre-

* Pages 8, 9. 39. † Page 40.

gations? Dr. Toulmin well knows, it has not been for want of the strongest representations, both from the pulpit and the press, of the immoral tendency of their principles. There is no system of religion that has suffered a larger portion of obloquy in the present century. Preachers, writers, and reviewers, of almost every description, have thought themselves at liberty to inveigh against "the gloomy, licentious, and blasphemous doctrines of Calvin." And yet we have experienced very little, if any, injury from these representations. Common people do not pay much regard to what is alleged by writers: they judge of the tree by its fruits. It is thus, as we reckon, that the accusations of our opponents have had but very little effect upon us: and if ours against them were not founded in truth, they would, in like manner, fall to the ground.

Dr. Toulmin complains of my using the term *Socinians*, as being a term of reproach.* For my own part, I would much rather call them by another name, if they would but adopt a fair one. Let them take a name that does not assume the question in dispute, and I would no longer use the term Socinians. But Dr. Toulmin seems to think, that there is no necessity for this: "The name," he says, "by which we choose to be called, is, you are sensible, that of Unitarians."† True; I am sensible that this is the name by which they choose to be called; but it is rather surprising to me, that Dr. Toulmin should be insensible, that in so doing, they choose also to *beg the question* in dispute. It seems, according to him, that we ought, at the very outset of our controversies, to acknowledge that we worship a plurality of Gods; that is, that our conduct is irrational and unscriptural! He thinks, that for Trinitarians to profess also to be Unitarians, or to worship but one God, "is strange and contradictory; that it is saying, that they who admit a threefold division, or distinction, in the divine nature, hold the same tenet with those who contend for its simple unity."‡ I know not who they are that admit of a division in the divine nature: and those who plead for a personal distinction in it, nevertheless maintain its simple unity, though they do not consider that

* Page 41. † Page 42. ‡ Page 43.

unity as personal; and, consequently, do not hold the same tenet with their opponents.

What is it that Dr. Toulmin desires, unless it be that we should grant him the question in dispute? Where a gentleman can be so very condescending, as in this manner to solicit for a name, it grates with my feelings to give him a denial. He must be reminded, however, that he has no right to expect it at our hands, much less to charge us with strange and contradictory assertions in case of our refusal.

The tone of positivity which our opponents assume, when defending their notion of the divine unity, is rather extraordinary; and, if we could but be persuaded to admit of confidence, in the place of evidence, their exclusive right to the name of Unitarians would be fully established. "This simple idea of God," says Dr. Toulmin, from Mr. Lindsey, "that he is one single person, literally pervades every passage of the sacred volumes."* A common reader of the Bible would not have thought of finding any thing relating to this subject in *every passage;* and, in those passages where the subject is introduced, who, except Mr. Lindsey and Dr. Toulmin, would have asserted, that the *personal* unity of the Deity literally pervaded them all? It might have answered a better purpose, if, instead of this general assertion, either of these gentlemen would have pointed us to *one single instance*, in which the unity of God is literally declared to be *personal.* Instead of this, we are asked, in the words of Mr. Lindsey, "How can we form any notion of the unity of the Supreme Being, but from that unity of which we ourselves are conscious?"† It is not impossible, or uncommon, for us to form ideas of three being one, and one three, *in different respects:* but what if, in this instance, we have no distinct idea? We do not profess to understand the mode of the divine subsistence. What notion can either we or our opponents form of the *spirituality* of the Supreme Being, or of any being who is purely *spiritual?* I can form no idea of any being who is not, like myself, corporeal: but it does not follow from thence, either that God must needs be a material being, or that there are no immaterial beings in the universe.

* Page 45. † Page 45. Note.

Dr. Toulmin, at length, comes to the title of my last letter, *The resemblance of Socinianism to Deism, and the tendency of the one to the other.* He calls this "a solecism," and charges it with "inconsistency and absurdity." "It implies," he says, "that to receive the divine mission of a Jesus, has a resemblance to considering him as a deceiver; that to take him as my master, the resurrection and the life, has a tendency to the rejection of him; that to learn of him, is to deny him; that to profess to obey him, resembles disobedience; and that to hope for the mercy of God in him, will lead me to cast off this hope."* Surely Dr. Toulmin must feel himself touched on a tender point, or he would not have so far lost the possession of himself, as to have suffered this paragraph to escape his pen. Can he seriously think, that it is on account of their receiving the divine mission of Jesus, their acknowledging him as their master, the resurrection and the life, their learning of him, professing to obey him, or hoping for the mercy of God in him, that we reckon their system to resemble Deism, or to have a tendency towards it? No: he knows the contrary.

But, "it is a singular circumstance," he adds, "that a resemblance and affinity to Deism should be ascribed to the creed of those amongst whom have arisen the most able critics on the scriptures, and the most eminent advocates for divine revelation."† Most eminent, no doubt, they are, in the opinion of Dr. Toulmin; but, let the eminency of their opinions be what it may, if, in criticising and defending the sacred oracles, they give up their inspiration; plead that they are interpolation; cashier whole chapters, where they are found to clash with a favorite hypothesis; tax the writers with reasoning inclusively; declare the whole an obscure book, not adapted to settle disputed theories, or to decide upon speculative, controverted questions, even in religion and morality; those sacred oracles will not admit them to be friends, but consider them as adversaries in disguise.

I have not attempted, as Dr. Toulmin suggests, to prove the relation of Socinianism to Deism, barely from an agreement *in some instances;* but from instances in which Socinians, by uniting with the Deists, have given up some of the fundamental principles by

* Page 45. † Pages 45, 46.

which Christians have been used to maintain their ground against them. Neither is the *success* of our opponents, in gaining numbers to their party, and its resemblace, in this respect, to Infidelity, *in itself* considered, alleged as an argument against them; but, rather, its being amongst the same description of people, mere speculatists in religion, and allowed to arise from a similar cause, namely, *a disregard to religion in general.* I have also attempted to prove, by several arguments, the direct *tendency* of Socinianism to Deism: but of these Dr. Toulmin has taken no notice. I have also appealed to facts: but neither is any notice taken of them. If further proof were needed, I might now appeal to *more recent* facts.

The new German reformers, if I am rightly informed, are making swift progress in this direction. Bahrdt, a little before his death, is said to have published a proposal, that the worship and instruction churches should be confined to natural religion, in which all agree. Last year, my informant adds, an anonymous writer carried the idea farther; he is for banishing from churches all the theory of natural religion, as there are disputes about a future state, snd the providence, perfections and even existence of God: and that only the duties of self-government, justice and beneficence should be taught. Of those who have *lately* joined the standard of Infidelity in our own country, is there not a large proportion of Socinians? Have not several of them, who were candidates for the ministry, and even ministers themselves, given up their work, and avowed their rejection of Christianity? It is not in the power of the leading characters amongst them to prevent these things. Socinianism is slippery ground; few will be able to stand upon it. Some few may, and doubtless will; but the greater part, I am persuaded, will either return to the principles which they have discarded, or go farther. Mrs. Barbauld might well represent their situation by that of "people walking over a precipice;" and describe "that class called *serious Christians*," amongst them, as "leaning to the safest side." A precipice, indeed, it is, or rather, the declivity of a rock, bulging into the sea, and covered with ice; a few wary individuals may frame to themselves a kind of artificial footing, and so retain their situation; but the greater part must either climb the summit, or fall into the deep.

"The general tenor of your book," says Dr. Toulmin, "and your mode of arguing, remind me, Sir, of a piece published in the last century, entitled, 'PURITANISME *the Mother; and* SINNE *the Daughter: or a Treatise wherein is demonstrated from twenty, several Doctrines and Positions of Puritanisme, that the Faith and Religion of the Puritans, doth forcibly induce its Professors to the perpetrating of* SINNE, *and doth warrant the committing of the same.*' I could wish the piece in your hands, and to see what remarks you would offer on the candour of the imputation, or the conclusiveness of the argument. The same remarks, I am inclined to think, would supply an answer to the general tenor of your own treatise."*

I have not seen the piece to which Dr. Toulmin refers, but I am inclined to think I should not be greatly at a loss to vindicate the Puritans from the charge; and that, without being necessitated to travel back seventeen hundred years for examples, and to *beg the question* in dispute, by taking it for granted, or even undertaking to prove, that the apostles and primitive Christians were Puritans. I have no doubt but the conduct of the accused would bear a comparison with that of their accusers. I could allege, from Mr. *Neale's History* of that persecuted people, (a work which Dr. Toulmin is now publishing,) that, "While others were at plays and interludes, at revels, or walking in the fields, or at the diversions of bowling, fencing, &c. on the evening of the Sabbath, the Puritans, with their families, were employed in reading the scriptures, singing psalms, catechising their children, repeating sermons, and prayer: nor was this only the work of the Lord's-day; but they had their hours of family-devotion on the week-days, esteeming it their duty to take care of the souls, as well as of the bodies of their servants. They were circumspect as to all the excesses of eating and drinking, apparel, and lawful diversions; being frugal in house-keeping, industrious in their particular callings, honest and exact in their dealings, and solicitous to give to every one his own."† If Dr. Toulmin could fairly allege the same things in behalf of the body of modern Unitarians, he need not

* Page 48. † Vol. I. Chap. VIII.

"call upon the churches of Christ in Judea and Samaria"* to bear witness to the holy efficacy of his doctrine.

And why does Dr. Toulmin complain of my "mode of arguing"? He might have found examples of it, without going back to the days of Puritanism. It is the same mode which has been adopted by his brethren against the Calvinists. They commenced the attack. I have only met them upon their own ground. A large proportion of my *Letters*, it is well known, are written on the defensive: and, if, in the course of the controversy, I have occasionally acted on the offensive, I had a right to do so. Dr. Toulmin's complaining of my "mode of arguing," is as if the Philistines had complained of the unfairness of the weapon by which Goliath lost his head.

I had observed, that "it was very common for those who go over to Infidelity to pass through Socinianism in their way." To this Dr. Toulmin answers, "A similar remark, if I mistake not, I have seen made, on the side of Popery, against the Reformation, that Protestantism was the pass to Infidelity."† But what does this prove? The question is, Is such a charge capable of being supported? A few solitary individuals might, doubtless, be produced: but, in return, I could prove, that *a great nation* has been led into Infidelity by Popery; and that the former is the natural offspring of the latter. If Dr. Toulmin could retort the charge against Socinianism with equal success, what he writes might, with propriety, be called *an answer*. But his reasoning amounts to no more than that of a person, who, being charged with a crime at the bar of his country, should argue, that a similar charge had been brought against other people, and that innocent characters had, in some instances, been wrongfully accused.

As a kind of answer to my XIth Letter, Dr. Toulmin has reprinted, in the form of an Appendix, a piece which he had published some years ago, in the Theological Repository, on *The Nature and Grounds of Love to Christ*. But, I conceive, I might as well reprint my XIth Letter, in reply to this, as he this, in answer to mine. His piece is not written against the Trinitarian,

* Page 39. † Page 46.

but the Arian hypothesis; and is pointed chiefly against the pre-existent glory of Christ being represented in scripture as the ground of love to him. But this position has little, if any, connexion with our ideas of the subject: for, though we contend that Christ did exist prior to his coming into the world yet, we have no idea of making his bare existence, but his glorious character and conduct, a ground of love. · It is not *how long* Christ has existed, but what he is, and what he has done, that endears him to us. If he be a mere creature, it is of very little account with us, whether he be seventeen hundred or seventeen thousand years old.* It is true, the pre-existence of Christ was necessary, in order that his coming into the world should be a *voluntary* act, as I have attempted to prove in my XIVth Letter; and his being possessed of a pre-existent glory was necessary, that his coming into the world might be an act of *humiliation* and *condescension*, as I have also, in the same place, attempted to prove it was: and this his voluntary humiliation, notwithstanding what Dr. Toulmin has written, affords a ground of love to him. No Christian, whose mind is not warped by system, can read such passages af the following, without feeling a glow of sacred gratitude.—*Verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham.—For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.—Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*† How foreign is this from Dr. Toulmin's assertion, "that the circumstance of Christ's degradation from a glorious pre-existent state, is never hinted at when his death is spoken of, though so proper to cast a glory around it, as illustrating his grace and philanthropy."‡

* See Joseph Pike of Warminster's Impartial View of the Trinitarian and Arian Scheme, Chap. X.

† Heb. ii. 16. 2 Cor. viii 9. Phil. ii. 6, 7. ‡ Page 61.

If Dr. Toulmin wished to answer my XIth Letter, why did he not prove, that the original *dignity* of Christ's character is never represented in scripture as the ground of love to him; that his mediation is exhibited in an equally important point of light by the Socinian, as by the Calvinistic scheme; and that the former represents us as equally indebted to his undertaking as the latter.

The "extravagant compliment" to which I referred, and concerning which Dr. Toulmin complains of my not having done him justice,* respected not Mr. Robinson, but his biographer; whom Dr. Toulmin characterized as "a learned and sensible writer;" and his performance on *the Nature of Subscription*, as a work "full of learning, of *all* judicious remarks, and liberal sentiment." I may remark, however, from Dr. Toulmin's account of his regard for Mr. Robinson, that he pays but little respect to the apostolic manner of regarding persons, namely, *for the truth's sake, that dwelleth in them.* Truth had no share in Dr. Toulmin's regard; but *the love of liberty* was substituted in its place, as a companion for piety. "My regard for Mr. Robinson," he says, "did not ebb and flow with *his opinions*," (a name by which our opponents choose to call religious principles;) "but was governed by the permanent qualities of the man, the friend of liberty and piety, and who had sacrificed much for conscience."†

Dr. Toulmin's performance concludes with a quotation from Dr. Lardner. There are several sentiments in it which I cordially approve. I cannot, however, acquiesce in the whole. "We should be cautious," he says, "of judging others—God alone knows the hearts of men, and all their circumstances, and is, therefore, the only judge what errors are criminal, and how far men fall short of improving the advantages afforded them, or act up to the light that has been given them."‡ We should, I grant, "be cautious of judging others; and I may add, should never attempt it, *but from their words or actions.* But, if it be presumptuous, *in this way*, to judge others, then is the tree not to be known by its fruits. In this case, though it might be lawful for Peter to declare to Simon that, by his *thinking that the gift of*

* Pages 50, 51. † Page 51. ‡ Page 52.

God might be purchased with money, he perceived that his heart was not right in the sight of God; and for Paul to address Elymas, on account of his opposition to the gospel, as *a child of the devil, an enemy of all righteousness,* seeing they were inspired of God; yet, it was utterly wrong for the Bishop of Landaff to apply this language to Mr. Paine; and his *Apology for the Bible,* (which is generally allowed to be written in a very gentle style,) must, nevertheless, be censured as presumptuous. Upon this supposition, Dr. Toulmin has written presumptuously, in affirming, that "the number of sincere, conscientious persons, attentive to the cultivation of pious affections, hath borne a small proportion to those who have been nominal Socinians and Calvinists."* It is presumptuous also in him to complain of the want of *candour* and *justice* in his opponent.† Yea, upon this supposition, it was presumption in the Analytical Reviewer to call what I had written "a presumptuous sentence, pronounced upon the *hearts* of those who adopt Socinian principles." If it be presumption to judge the hearts of men by their words and actions, what right had he to judge of mine? A presumptuous sentence is a sentence which proceeds from a presumptuous *spirit.* His censure, therefore, includes the very fault, if it be a fault, against which it is pointed. It resembles the conduct of a man, who should *swear* that he disapproves of *oaths;* or, who should *falsely* accuse his neighbour of being a *liar.*

If it be presumptuous to judge of the hearts of men by their words and actions, it must be presumptuous to judge of the good or evil of any action. For no action, considered separately from its motive, is either good or evil. It is no otherwise good or evil, than as it is the expression of the heart. To judge an action, therefore, to be either this or that, is to judge the heart to be so.

I may be told, that Dr. Lardner is not speaking of immorality, but of *errors in judgment.* True; but his reasoning would apply to actions, as well as errors. The former *may* be as innocent as the latter. The killing of a man, for instance, *may* have arisen from mere accident. It is the motive which governed the action,

* Page 36. † Page 39.

that determines its guilt or innocence; "but God alone knows the hearts of men, and all their circumstances, and is, therefore, the only judge what *actions* are criminal." In this manner, we might censure the proceedings of a jury, which should sit in judgment upon a person, to determine whether the act by which he has taken away the life of a fellow-creature arose from accident or design.

Who can say, with infallible precision, concerning any action, how far the author of it "has fallen short of improving the advantages afforded him; or how far he has failed of acting up to the light that has been given him?" If this reasoning, therefore, prove any thing, it will prove that men are utterly incompetent for any kind of judgment, in things which relate to good and evil.

A man may err in his notions of morality, as well as concerning evangelical truth: he may think, with some modern unbelievers, that the confining of a man to one woman is unnatural; that fornication is allowable; and that even adultery is but a small crime; and, where it is undetected, no crime at all. Now, if God alone is to judge of these errors, God alone must also judge of the actions resulting from them: for there can be no more of moral evil in the one, than in the other. If the former may be innocent, so may the latter; and all being to us uncertainty, owing to our ignorance of the motive, or state of mind, from whence such notions were formed, together with the advantages which the party may have possessed, we must, in all such cases, entirely cease from passing censure.

If it be alleged, that there are such light and evidence in favor of chastity, that no man can err on that subject, unless his error arise from some evil bias; I answer, this is what, in other cases, is called judging men's hearts; and why may I not as well say, there are such light and evidence in favor of the gospel, that no man can reject it, but from an evil bias? This appears to me to be the truth; and the ground on which unbelief is threatened with *damnation*, and a *denial of the Lord who bought us, followed with swift destruction.*

Far be it from me to indulge a censorious spirit, or to take pleasure in thinking ill of any man. Nay; far be it from me, to pass

any kind of judgment on any man, further than I am called to do so; and, when this is the case, I desire it may always be in meekness and fear; knowing, not only that I also am judged of others, but that all of us, and all our decisions must be tried, another day, at a higher tribunal.

It may be asked, What call have we to pass any kind of judgment upon those who disown the deity and atonement of Christ? I answer, we are called either to admit them, as fellow-christians, into communion with us, or refuse to do so. We are necessitated therefore, to pass some judgment; and this is all that we do pass. We do not pretend to say, concerning any individual, that *we are certain that he is not in a state of salvation;* but we say, *we cannot perceive sufficient ground to warrant our acknowledging him as a fellow-christian.*

We must either admit every pretender to Christianity into communion with us, and so acknowledge him as a fellow-christian; or we shall be accused of judging the hearts of men. The rule by which we admit to fellowship is, a *credible profession of Christianity.* There are two things which render a profession credible:— First: that the thing professed be Christianity: Secondly: that the profession be accompanied with a practice correspondent with it. If a man say he loves God, and lives in malevolence against his brother, all will admit that he ought to be rejected: and, though such rejection may include a kind of judgment upon his heart, none will object to our proceedings on this account. But, if this be judging the heart, we suppose we have a right, and are obliged, to judge it from *words*, as well as from actions. If the profession which a person makes of Christianity do not include what, in our jugdment, is essential to it, we cannot consistently admit him to communion with us, not acknowledge him as a fellow-christian.— *Our judgment* must be the rule of *our conduct.* If we err, so it is; but we ought not to act in opposition to our convictions. To acknowledge a person as a fellow-christian, while we consider him as defective in the essentials of Christianity, would be to act hypocritically, and tend to deceive the souls of men.

Some persons have spoken and written, as though we *invaded the right of private judgment* by refusing to commune with those who avow Socinian principles. But, if a community have not a right to refuse, and even to exclude, an individual, whose sentiments they consider as subversive of the gospel, neither has an individual any right to separate himself from a community, whose sentiments he considers in a similar light. Provided they would forbear with him, he ought to do the same with them. The principle condemns not only the Reformation from Popery, but all other reformations in which individuals have withdrawn from a corrupt community, and formed one of a purer nature. Under a plea for liberty, it would chain down the whole Christian world in slavery; obliging every community to hold fellowship with persons between whom and them there is an entire want of Christian concord. It aims to establish the liberty of the individual at the expense of that society. Our opponents, however, will be silent in this case. They, with proper consistency, persuade their people to come out from Trinitarian communities.* Were I to imbibe their sentiments, I should follow their counsel, and separate myself from those whom *I accounted Idolaters*: or, if the community should be beforehand with me, and separate me from them, as one whom *they accounted a subverter of the gospel*, however such a separation might prove to my feelings, I should have no just reason to complain.

In our view, our opponents have renounced the principal ideas included in those primitive forms of confession, *Jesus is the Christ—Jesus Christ is the Son of God:* and, as charity itself does not require us to acknowledge and treat that as Christianity, which in our judgment, is not so; we think it our duty, in love, and with a view to their conviction, both by our words and actions, to declare our decided disapprobation of thier principles. We lay no claim to infallibility, any more than our opponents. We act according to our judgment, and leave them to act according to theirs; looking forward to that period when we shall all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ.

* See Mr. Kentish, p. 44. Note.

APPENDIX:

CONTAINING A FEW REMARKS ON DR. TOULMIN'S REVIEW OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

FIRST: Let it be observed, that Dr. Toulmin, by appealing to the history of the Acts of the Apostles, would seem to be an adherent to scripture, and to disregard every thing else in comparison with it. But, if the system which he espouses be so friendly to the scriptures, how is it that they are treated with so little respect by almost all the writers who embrace it? and why did not Dr. Toulmin answer my Letter on "Veneration for the Scriptures," (No. XII.) in which this charge is substantiated?

Secondly: Dr. Toulmin proceeds on the supposition, that the history of the Acts of the Apostles is, in itself, independent of the other parts of the sacred writings, a complete account of the substance, at least, of what the Apostles preached, and that it ascertains those principles, the publication of which preceded the conversions in this primitive age. But why should he suppose this? The book professes to be a history of the *Acts* of the Apostles. As to the *principles* which operated in producing the great effects of those times, they are occasionally touched; but, that not being the professed object of the sacred writer, it is but occasionally. He does not always relate even the substance of what the Apostles preached. For instance, he tells us, that Paul preached at Troas until midnight,* but makes no mention of any thing that he taught. He informs us of that Apostle's conversion to Christianity, and makes no mention, it is true, of those principles which I have supposed necessary to repentance and faith, as having had any influence in producing that effect; such a conviction of the evil nature of sin, our own depravity, &c. and this silence of the sacred

* Chap. xx. 8—12.

writer Dr. Toulmin improves into an argument against me.* But, if we hence infer, that these principles had no influence in conversion, in that of Saul, for example, we must contradict the Apostle's own particular account of this matter, which he has stated in the seventh chapter to the Romans; where he intimates, that by a view of the sprituality of the divine law, he was convinced of his own depravity, and of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and died, as to all hopes of acceptance with God by the deeds of the law.

When any thing is said, in the Acts of the Apostles, concerning principles, the account is very *general.—They ceased not to teach and preach* JESUS CHRIST. In Samaria, Philip *preached* CHRIST. Unto the eunuch he preached JESUS, and declared that *Christ was the* Son of GOD. The discourses of the Apostles are frequently called THE WORD OF THE LORD, and THE WORD OF GOD.†

To suppose that the principles which are particularly specified in the history of the Acts, were the only ones which were influential in the conversions of those times, would be to exclude, not only those doctrines which are commonly called Calvinistic, but various others, which are allowed, on all hands, to be the first principles of religion; such as, the being of a God, the excellency and purity of his moral government, the divine origin of the Old Testament, &c. The apostles, in preaching to the Jews, did not assert these principles, but they *supposed* them. It were unreasonable to expect they should have done otherwise; seeing these were principles which their hearers professedly admitted: yet it does not follow, that they had no influence in their conversion. On the contrary, we are assured, that *he that cometh to God, must believe that he is;* and that *by the law is the knowledge of sin.* Nor is it less evident, that to embrace the Messiah, includes an approbation of those scriptures which foretold his character and conduct.

Thirdly: Though the writer of the Acts of the Apostles does not profess to give us even the substance of the ministry of the

* Letter III.

† Chap. v. 42. viii. 5. 35. 37. ix. 20. xiii. 5. xiv. 25. xvii. 3.

apostles, yet he says sufficient to convince an unprejudiced reader, that their doctrine was very different from that of Socinus, or of modern Unitarians. It is true, they spake of Christ as *a man, a man approved of God by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him ;* and taught that *God raised him from the dead :* and, if we had denied either of these truths, it would have been in point for Dr. Toulmin to have laboured, all through his Second and Third Letters, to establish them. But they taught the proper *deity*, as well as the humanity of Christ ; and atonement by his death, as well as the fact of his resurrection. They exhibited him as *the Lord*, on whose *name sinners* were to call for salvation ;* and declared, that by the shedding of his blood *his church was purchased*, and believing sinners *justified from all things from which they could not be justified by* the law of Moses.†

Peter, in his first sermon, addressed the Jews upon principles, of the truth of which they, in their consciences, were convinced : *Ye men of Israel*, said he, *hear these words ; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God—by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you*, AS YE YOURSELVES ALSO KNOW, *—ye—by wicked hands have crucified and slain.*‡ Upon these principles he grounded others, of which they were *not convinced ;* namely, his resurrection from the dead,§ his exaltation at the right hand of God,‖ his being made both Lord and Christ,¶ and of remission of sins through his name.** In his next sermon, he asserted him to be *the son of God*,†† the *Holy One, and the Just, the Prince* (*or author*) *of life*, whom they had *killed*, preferring a murderer before him.‡‡ If Jesus was the *author* of life in the same sense in which Barabbas was the *destroyer* of it, then was the antithesis proper, and the charge adapted to excite the greatest alarm. It was nothing less than declaring to them, that, in crucifying Jesus of

* Chap. ii. 21. Compare Chap. ix. 14. xxii. 16. Rom. x. 12. and 1 Cor. i. 22

† Chap. xx. 28. xiii. 39.

‡ Chap. ii. 22. § Verse 24—32. ‖ Verse 33. ¶ Verse 36. ** Verse 38.

†† Chap. iii. 13. ‡‡ Chap. iii. 14, 15.

Nazareth, they had *crucified the Lord of glory* or that the person whom they had slain was no other than the Creator of the world, in human nature! In the first instance, the Apostle appealed to what the Jews *themselves knew* of Christ; in the last, to what *he knew* concerning him, who, with his fellow-apostles, had *beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father.*

Did Peter speak as would a "modern Unitarian,"* when he said to his countrymen, *Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved?* Such language, I fear, is seldom, if ever, used in their pulpits. It is such, however, as I have never met with in their writings. On the contrary, one of their principal writers endeavours to explain it away, or to prove, that it is not meant of "salvation to eternal life, but of deliverance from bodily diseases."†

Dr. Toulmin finds Stephen before the council, but makes no mention of his death; in which he is described as praying to Christ, saying, *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.—Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.* Having made a few remarks upon the eighth chapter, he observes, "I next meet with this Apostle (Peter) receiving an extraordinary commission to preach unto Cornelius and his house."‡ But why does he skip over the ninth chapter, which gives an account of the conversion of Saul? Was it because we there find the primitive Christians described as *calling upon the name of the Lord Jesus?* (ver. 14. 21.) And why does he make mention of "the fine speech of the Apostle Paul to the elders of the church at Ephesus," and yet overlook that solemn charge, *Feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood?*§ Is it because he thinks, with Dr. Priestley, that "we ought to be exceedingly cautious, how we admit such an expression?"‖ That seems to be the reason. But then, we ought to be as cautious, how we admit the book which contains it.

* Dr. Toulmin, p. 14. †Dr. Priestley's Familiar Letters, No. XIV.

‡ Page 17. § Chap. xx. 28. ‖ Familiar Illustrations, p. 36.

In preaching to the Jews, the apostles insisted that Jesus *was the Christ*, the *promised Messiah*, *the Son of God;* resting the proof of these assertions upon the fact *that God had raised him from the dead;* and Dr. Toulmin reckons this to be, "what, in modern style, is called Unitarianism."* But this is proceeding too fast. Before such a conclusion can be fairly drawn, it must be proved, that these propositions have the same meaning in the Socinian creed, as in that of the apostles. Let us examine whether that be the case. When they asserted, that *Jesus was the Christ*, the meaning of the terms must be supposed to have been sufficiently understood. When Paul preached at Athens, though he ultimately brought Christ into his discourse, yet he did not use this kind of language. It would have been improper to have done so. The Athenians would not have understood what he meant by *Jesus being the Christ* but the Jews did; and the ideas which they would attach to this name, must be collected from the means of information which they possessed. If, as Socinians affirm, the *Christ* preached by the apostles, was only an instructor of mankind; if he suffered martyrdom only in confirmation of his doctrine; and if his being called *the Son of God*, denoted him to be nothing more than human; it must be supposed that these were the ideas which the prophets had given of the Messiah, which our Lord himself had professed, and which the Jews had understood him to profess. And, if all this be true, it must be granted, that the apostles used these terms in the sense of our opponents; and Dr. Toulmin's conclusion, that "their preaching was the same, for substance, as that of modern Unitarians," is just. But, if the Messiah, prefigured by Jewish sacrifices, and predicted by the prophets, was to take away the sins of the world, by being made an atoning sacrifice; if Christ, in professing to be *the Son of God*, professed to be *equal with God;* and if his countrymen generally so understood him, and, therefore, accused him of *blasphemy*, and put him to death; then it is not true that the apostles could use these terms in the sense of our opponents, and Dr. Toulmin's conclusion is totally unfounded.

The reader may now judge of the propriety of the following language, used by Dr. Toulmin. "If you suppose, Sir, that these

* Page 28.

sentiments were inculcated and blended with the great truth, the Messiahship of Jesus, it is *supposition* only, which is not supported by the testimony of the historian, nor by the practice of the apostolic preachers on any other occasion. You may build on suppositions; but I must be allowed to adhere to what is written."*

Now, I appeal to the intelligent reader, whether Dr. Toulmin has any thing more than *supposition*, as the ground of his conclusion, that the apostles, in teaching *that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God*, "taught nothing more than what, in modern style, is called the Unitarian doctrine." The only ground for such a conclusion, is, the *supposition* that the Messiah, predicted by the Jewish prophets, was not to become an atoning sacrifice, but a mere instructor of mankind: that he was to be merely a man; that his being called the Son of God, denoted him to be nothing more than human; that this was the substance of what he himself professed, and of what the Jews understood him to profess. All this is mere *supposition*, for which not the shadow of a proof is offered; and yet, without it, Dr. Toulmin's conclusion must fall to the ground.

Contrary to all this supposition, I take leave to observe, First: That the Messiah prefigured by the Jewish sacrifices, and predicted by the prophets, *was* to become a sacrifice of atonement or propitiation, for the sins of the world. *His soul was to be made an offering for sin. The Lord was to lay on him the iniquity of us all. He was the Lamb of God, who was to take away the sin of the world.*† But, if the Old Testament representations were in favor of the Messiah's being an atoning sacrifice, the apostles, in declaring Jesus to be the Messiah, virtually declared him to be an atoning sacrifice. Secondly: That the Messiah, predicted by the prophets, was to be God manifest in the flesh, or God in our nature. Unto the *Son* it was said, *Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever. The child born* was to be *called* the mighty God. *He* who was to *feed his flock like a shepherd, to gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom*, was no other than *the Lord God, who would come with strong hand, and* whose *arm should rule for him. The goings forth* of him who was to be born in Bethlehem, *were of old,*

* Page 24. † Isaiah liii. 6. 10. John i. 29.

from everlasting.* But, if the prophetic representations of the Messiah, were in favor of his being God in our nature, the apostles, in declaring Jesus to be the Messiah, virtually declared him to be God in our nature. Thirdly: That our Lord, in saying *I am the Son of God*, was understood by the Jews as claiming an *equality with God;* that he was, on this account, accused of blasphemy, and finally put to death; and all this without having said any thing that should contradict the idea which they entertained. Jesus said, *My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also, that God was his Father, making himself equal with God. The Jews said, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.*† But for the apostles, under these circumstances, and without explaining away the supposed blasphemy, to assert that *Jesus was the Son of God*, was the same thing as asserting him to be equal with God: and their calling on his murderers to *repent and be baptized in his name, for the remission of sins*, was calling them to retract their charge of blasphemy; to embrace him in that very character for claiming which they had put him to death; and to place all their *hopes of forgiveness in his* NAME, *by which alone they could be saved.*‡

From these premises, and not from mere *supposition*, I conclude, that the deity and atonement of Christ, were comprehended in the great doctrines of his Sonship and Messiahship.

If Dr. Toulmin's remarks on the Acts of the Apostles are foreign to the argument, much more so are those which respect the concessions of ancient Fathers, and modern churches and churchmen. To these I shall make no reply. And, though I have so far followed him, as, in these few pages, to reply to some of his observations; yet, I desire it may be noticed, that I shall not hold myself obliged to pursue this subject any further. If Dr. Toulmin choose to resume the controversy, let him keep to the subject; namely, *The moral tendency of our respective systems.* Any thing besides this will be entitled to no reply.

* Psalm xlv. 6. Compare Heb. i. 8. Isa. ix. 6. xl. 10, 11. Micah v. 2.

† John v. 17, 18. xix. 7. ‡ Acts ii. 38. iv. 12.

A REPLY

TO

MR. KENTISH'S SERMON, &c.

MR. KENTISH entitles his Discourse, *The Moral Tendency of the Genuine Christian Doctrine*. This title is either *irrelative*, to the professed object of his undertaking, or it is a *begging the question*. If he only meant to affirm, that the genuine Christian doctrine, be it what it may, is productive of moral effects in those who embrace it, this is what none but a professed Infidel would deny. It is a principle which every denomination of Christians admits. It is the datum on which I have proceeded, in endeavouring to ascertain what the genuine Christian doctrine is. If, therefore, Mr. Kentish, intends only to prove what his title announces, his performance must be totally *irrelative* to its professed object; and contains no answer to the piece against which it is written. But it is possible, that, by the *genuine christian doctrine*, Mr. Kentish means what "he sincerely *believes* to be such," or what he calls the Unitarian doctrine. But this is *begging the question* at the outset. Our opponents must surely be reduced to very *necessitous* circumstances, or they would not condescend to such humble methods of establishing their principles.

Mr. Kentish, speaking of my Letters on Socinianism, observes, that "it was by no means his intention, or his wish, to canvass every observation which is there advanced." To canvass every observation might be unnecessary; but an answer to any work ought

to enter upon a full and thorough discussion of the principal subjects included in it.

A performance that does not require this, requires no answer at all. I cannot think, therefore, that either Dr. Toulmin or Mr. Kentish are justifiable, in evading the body of the arguments contained in the publication which they meant to answer. The number of veterans, in literary war, which are to be found on the side of our opponents, renders it difficult to account for their refusing to hazard a decisive engagement, without imputing it to a conviction that they stand upon *disadvantageous ground*. Dr. Toulmin has proved *his* dislike to it by a barefaced attempt to shift it. Mr. Kentish has not done so: his peformance has less evasion, and less assuming of the question in debate, and, consequently, is more respectable than that of his colleague. He keeps upon the proper ground: but, as though he thought it enchanted, he hurries over it, touching upon only a few of the topics of discussion, and taking but very little notice of the arguments of his opponent, as he passes along. It is a retreat, instead of a regular engagement; a running fight, rather than a pitched battle. In favour of such a mode of conducting the controversy, it is possible he might choose to print in the form of a sermon.

But Mr. Kentish has *reasons* for not being more particular in his answer: "Of Mr. Fuller's remarks, many," says he, "are personal, and many refer solely to a vindication of the religious principles that he has seen proper to embrace."* If many of my remarks be *personal*, Mr. Kentish had a right to point them out; and ought to have done so, rather than content himself with a general accusation, unsubstantiated by a single proof. That I have vindicated those religious principles which I have thought proper to embrace, is true: the misrepresentation and contempt with which they have been treated by the Reviewers, and other Socinian writers, rendered a vindication of them necessary; and, if our opponents have now retreated within the limits of their own territory, and are contented to act, in future, merely on the defensive; it may be presumed, without arrogance, that it has not been altogether without effect.

* Page 3, *Preface*.

Mr. Kentish seems not only contented to act on the defensive, with respect to the moral tendency of his principles, but also with respect to the actual *moral effects* produced by them. He thinks, "in point of fact, it can scarcely be proved, that, in love to God, they are *surpassed* by their fellow-christians; though God forbid," he adds, "that we should rashly arrogate to ourselves *superiority of virtue!*"* Rash, arrogant, and shocking, however, as this pretence appears to Mr. Kentish, it is no more than has been made by his brethren. All that Dr. Priestley has written upon the gloomy and immoral tendency of Calvinism, implies a pretence to a superiority of virtue. What else is meant by his charging our views with being "unfavourable to the love of both God and man; and an axe at the root of all virtue?" He accuses us of "living in the dread of all free inquiry? whereas they are in the way of growing wiser and better, as long as they live." He also goes about to weigh the virtue of Unitarians and Trinitarians; and, though he allows the former to have most of an apparent conformity to the world, yet, "upon the whole, he supposes them to approach nearest to the proper temper of Christianity." Mr. Belsham does not scruple to assert, that "they—who are sincerely pious and diffusively benevolent *with* these principles, could not have failed to have been much *better*, and much happier, had they adopted a milder, a more rational, a more truly evangelical creed." These are passages which I have quoted and answered, in my *Letters on Socinianism:* and what else can be made of them, but *a pretence to superiority of virtue!* I do not accuse these writers of rashness or arrogance, in making such pretences, unless it be on account of their asserting what they are unable to maintain. It would be consistent with Christian humility to prove, that true believers are men of superior virtue to unbelievers; and if any denomination of professing Christians have an advantage over others, in this respect, they have a right, especially when accused by them of immorality, fairly and modestly to state it. But who can forbear to pity the situation of men who, after all these challenges, on the first close inquiry that is made into the justice of

* Page 13.

their claims, are reduced to the dire necessity of giving them up, of standing merely upon the defensive, and of exclaiming against the *rashness of arrogating to themselves a superiority of virtue!*

It will be time enough for Mr. Kentish to "admit a claim to infallibility," when such a claim is made; or to a "knowledge of the motives or designs of men," any farther than as they are made manifest by their words and actions, when his opponent makes any pretence to it. In this way, I suppose, he himself will not scruple to judge the heart; since he proposes, in the same page, to "illustrate the *spirit* in which my examination is written."* I assure Mr. Kentish, it was neither in an "unguarded" nor a "guarded" moment, that I presumed to charge Unitarians with having a heart secretly disaffected to the true character and government of God, and dissatisfied with the gospel way of salvation. Rather, was it not in an unguarded moment, that he, as well as several of his brethren in the reviewing department, accused me of so doing? If any of these writers thought proper to quote my words, why did they not quote the whole sentence, as it stands? by their method of quotation, one might prove, from the scriptures, that *there is no God.*

The proposition, as it stands in my Letters, is *conditional.* It is true, the thing affirmed is, that "the avenues which lead to Socinianism are not an openness to conviction, or a free and impartial inquiry after truth; but a heart secretly disaffected to the true character and government of God, and dissatisfied with the gospel way of salvation: but the *condition* on which the truth of this proposition is suspended, is that Socinianism is a system the character of which is, that "irreligious men are the first, and serious Christians, the last, to embrace it." Now, do our opponents mean to admit, without hesitation or explanation, that this *is* the character of Socinianism? I know, indeed, they have conceded thus much; but I was ready to suppose, that, upon its being represented to them in its own colours, they would have recalled, or, at least, have endeavoured to put a more favourable construction upon their concessions. But, it should seem, by their applying

* Page 4, *Preface.*

the latter branch of the proposition to themselves, they admit the former, as properly characteristic of their system: and, if they admit the one, I see no cause to recede from the other.

I have contended, that it is not presumption to judge of men's motives *by their words and actions;* and that it is what our opponents, as well as all other men, do, in innumerable instances. In this instance, however, *I have not judged the motives of any individual.* The thing affirmed barely respects *the general course of things.* The avenues which lead to any place are the ordinary passages through which persons enter: but it does not follow, that they are the only ones. Were I to assert that the avenues which lead to *offensive war* are not, as its abettors would persuade us to think, a desire to maintain the honour of their country; but a heart secretly dissatisfied to the true interests of mankind, and dissatisfied with the morality of the gospel; such an assertion I fear, would contain but too much truth: it would not denote, however, that there never was an individual who engaged in such wars, but from such motives. Persons may be drawn into them unawares, and contrary to their inclination; and, being once engaged may find it difficult to recede. Thus, with respect to our religious sentiments, education, connexions, and various other things, may have great influence in determining them. How far such things may consist with sincere love to Christ, I have not undertaken to decide. But, as, in the one case, a person would generally find his heart averse from actual engagements, and leaning towards a peace; so, I apprehend, it will be in the other: like the *serious Christians* mentioned by Mrs. Barbould, though they may rank with Socinians, yet their hearts will *lean* towards the doctrine that exalts the Saviour, and exhibits him as the atoning sacrifice.

Before Mr. Kentish enters on the defence of his principles, on the ground of their moral tendency, he offers six remarks. These are as follows:

1. "An obvious effect of the impressions to which mankind are exposed from surrounding objects, is, that no principles can so

fully influence the conduct, as might be expected in theory."* True; but the same remark equally requires to be made in favour of Calvinism, as of Socinianism. There is nothing in it, therefore, appropriate, or which goes to account for that want of practical religion which is acknowledged peculiarly to attend the professors of the latter.

2. "While some men are, confessedly, much better than their principles, it will not, it cannot be disputed, that to the most valuable principles others fail of doing justice."† That some men's hearts are better than their systems, is true; and for this reason, notwithstanding all that is said by my opponents to the contrary, I have not presumed to decide upon the state of individuals.

It is also allowed, that "to the most valuable principles others fail of doing justice." This is the same thing, for substance, as that which I have acknowledged, in my introductory observations; and I have, therefore, never reasoned either from the bad or good conduct of individuals, but from that of the *general body*. It is true, I have mentioned the names of some eminent persons among the Calvinists; but it was merely to confront an assertion of Mr. Belsham, that those who were singularly pious, and diffusely benevolent, *with* Calvinistic principles, could not have failed to have been much better, and much happier, if they had imbibed a different creed." The piety and benevolence of Hale, Franck, Brainerd, Edwards, Whitefield, Thornton, and Howard, were introduced as a proof, that such degrees of virtue have been found amongst Calvinists, as have never been exceeded by men of what are called Rational principles, or indeed, of any principles whatever.

3. "It deserves to be considered, farther, whether doctrines which have most efficacy upon the dispositions, the conduct, and the feelings of Christians, be not such as they profess in common."‡ I have no objection to this, or any other subject, being considered; though I am persuaded, the result of an impartial consideration, in this case, would be different from that which is suggested by Mr. Kentish: but, granting his supposition to be true,

* Page 6. † Ibid. ‡ Page 7.

the difficulty on his side is just where it was. If the principles which Calvinists and Socinians hold in common, be the grand, sources of virtue, why do they not influence both alike? Why is it that "Rational Christians are spoken of, as indifferent to practical religion;" and that those who acknowledge this charge, as Dr. Priestley and Mr. Belsham have done, are not able to vindicate them from it? If Calvinists and Socinians hold principles in common, which are of a holy tendency, and yet the latter are the most indifferent to practical religion, there must be something unfavourable to virtue, one should think, in their peculiar sentiments.

4. "From a natural partiality, moreover, to opinions which themselves embrace, men will suppose those opinions to have a tendency peculiarly favourable to virtue and happiness. There is danger therefore, lest the conclusion to which I have adverted, be drawn rather by the feelings, than by the understanding; rather by prejudice than by calm and unbiassed reason."* To this, I answer, if the conclusions which have been drawn be unreasonable, they are capable of being proved so.

5. "In their ideas, too, of moral excellence, different sects of Christians may not exactly agree.—Many of them severely censure certain instances of conformity to the world, which others of them may think not merely lawful, but deverving of praise."† True. Some, for example, may live in the disuse of prayer; and may plead, in excuse, that this practice does not accord with their ideas of devotion. They may also frequent the gaming table, and the assembly room, and occasionally, if not constantly, resort to the theatre; and may contend that each is an innocent, if not a praiseworthy amusement. But if people are not to be criminated beyond the line marked out by their own opinions of morality, our "moderation" must extend farther than Mr. Kentish himself might be willing to allow. There are people in the world who think favourably of polygamy, and others who would plead for fornication, yea, for adultery itself, provided it were kept a secret; yet, it is to be hoped, he would not think the better of such practices, on this account. On the contrary, he must think himself warranted

* Page 8. † Ibid.

to conclude, in ordinary cases at least, that the opinions of such persons were formed under the influence of an immoral bias, and therefore, that they themselves partake of the nature of immorality.

6. "The very nature of the argument proposed, renders it extremely difficult to deduce from it a satisfactory inference. If to judge respecting the conduct of men, even in single cases, demand much care and knowledge, far more requisite are these qualifications when sentence is to be passed upon their general character. Who, indeed, is so intimately acquainted with the various denominations of Christians, as to form a decision upon this point, that shall not be liable to the imputation of partiality, or of rashness?"* That care and knowledge are necessary, in such a comparison, I shall not dispute; and, if I have betrayed my want of either, I presume it is capable of being exposed: but, that the thing itself is impracticable, I cannot admit. It is not impossible to discover who, in general, are serious, conscientious, and pious men, and who they are that indulge in dissipation and folly. The observation of Mr. Kentish, if it prove any thing, proves that the moral tendency of a doctrine is no proper criterion of its truth. Yet he acknowledges, that "In religion the maxim, Ye shall know them by their fruits, is a maxim, unquestionably, of high authority, evident reason, and familiar application."† How can these things consist together? If it be of "familiar application," it cannot be "extremely difficult," nor require any extraordinary degree of understanding to apply it. Let there be what difficulty there may, however, in this case, my work, so far as related to facts, was done ready to my hand. Dr. Priestley, Mr. Belsham, and Mrs. Barbauld, were my authorities for the want of regard to practical religion amongst Rational Christians: writers whom Mr. Kentish will not accuse of the want of either "care or knowledge;" and to whom he will not, in this cause, impute either "partiality or rashness."

It has been suggested, by some who are friendly to the cause of Socinianism, though not professed Socinians, that I have made an unfair use of a few concessions; and that a similar use might be

* Pages 8, 9. † Page 5.

made of the concessions of many of the Puritans, who, in their day, lamented the imperfections and degeneracy of their own people. If Dr. Priestley and his brethren had barely acknowledged, that there were great defects amongst their people when compared with the primitive Christians, or with what they ought to be, this, I confess, had been no more than what Puritan writers have done, and the writers of every other denomination of Christians might have done; and such acknowledgments ought not to have been improved against them. But, who, beside themselves, have ever professed to hold a set of principles, to the discernment of which an indifference to religion in general was favourable; a system which those who were most indifferent to the *practice* of religion were the first, and serious Christians the last, to embrace? Who beside themselves, have been reduced, by facts which they could not deny, to such dire necessity?

From the foregoing introductory observations, Mr. Kentish proceeds to the body of his discourse, which he divides into four heads of inquiry. "I. What is the tendency of the Unitarian doctrine with respect to the cultivation and exercise of the divine, the social, and the personal virtues? II. What assistance, support, and consolation it affords, in the season of temptation, affliction, and death? III. What is its efficacy in the conversion of profligates, and unbelievers? And IV. Finally, How far is it adapted to promote a veneration for the scriptures, and to fortify our faith in Christianity?"

I. On the divine, the social, and the personal virtues.

Under the first of these particulars, Mr. Kentish very properly considers "love to God;" and, so far as he attempts an answer to what I have written, I suppose this is to be considered as an answer to my VIIth Letter. The substance of what he advances upon this subject is as follows.—"We believe, according to the sublime language of the favourite Apostle, that *God is love;* we consider all his moral excellencies, as justice, truth, and holiness, as modifications of this principle. Happiness we regard as the grand object of his works and dispensations, and conceive of his glory as resulting from the diffusion of this happiness."

"These being our ideas of the Deity, love to him cannot fail to be *shed abroad in our hearts.* Did we think of him, indeed, as one altogether like unto ourselves, did we imagine that he is vindictive, inexorable, arbitrary, and partial; and did we suppose his glory to be something distinct from the exercise of his goodness; we might experience difficulty in obedience to this first and greatest of the commandments. But, in the contemplation of infinite power, emyloyed to execute designs which proceed from infinite benevolence, and are planned by consummate wisdom, filial affection towards God is naturally enkindled and preserved alive in our breasts."*

On this statement, I would observe, in the first place, that it passes over one very important topic of discussion between us; namely, the doctrine of the atonement. Why is it that Mr. Kentish has passed over this doctrine? He knows that Socinian writers have charged it with implying *the natural implacability of God;* a charge, against which I have attempted to defend it. Have I not a right to conclude, from Mr. Kentish's silence on this head, that he feels the ground to be untenable?

Mr. Kentish has not only declined the discussion of one of the most important subjects, but those topics which have fallen under his notice, are stated with great *unfairness.* His account of my sentiments, respecting the vindictive character of God, is marked by the grossest misrepresentation. I had carefully explained the term *vindictive*, when applied to the divine conduct in the punishment of sin, by observing, that "it is very common for people, when they speak of vindictive punishment, to mean that kind of punishment which is inflicted from a wrathful disposition, or a disposition to punish for the pleaure of punishing. Now, if this be the meaning of our opponents, we have no dispute with them. We We do not suppose the Almighty to punish sinners for the sake of putting them to pain. Vindictive punishment, as it is here defended, stands opposed to that punishment which is merely *corrective.* The one is exercised for the good of the party; the other not so, but for the good of the community." (Letter VII.)

* Pages 11, 12.

Now, though Mr. Kentish must have observed this statement, yet he has suffered himself to write as follows:—"Did we imagine that God is vindictive, inexorable, arbitrary, and partial; or did we suppose his glory to be something distinct from the exercise of his goodness; we might experience difficulty in obedience to this first and greatest of the commandments."* As a proof, it should seem, that these were my sentiments, Mr. Kentish refers to page 119, of the second edition of my Letters, where I have acknowledged, that there is a mixture of *the vindictive* in the Calvinistic system. But have I not also, in the same page, so explained my meaning as to reject those offensive ideas which Mr. Kentish has introduced in connexion with it? Why did he hold up my acknowledgment, concerning the vindictive character of God, without, at the same time, holding up that sense of it in which I professed to defend it? Or, if he might think himself excused from this, why did he connect such terms with it as must exhibit it in a different and contrary sense, even that very sense in which I had opposed it? I cannot but consider this as disingenuous; and as greatly resembling the conduct of certain Deists, who, in their attacks upon Christianity, choose first to dress it up in the habits of Popery.

As to the glory of God consisting in the exercise of his goodness, if it be meant of the *manifestation* of the divine glory, and goodness be put for *moral excellence*, it is the same thing as that which I have acknowledged; namely, that "the glory of God *consists* in doing that which shall be best upon the whole:" but, by goodness, Mr. Kentish means merely beneficence, undistinguished beneficence, or the pursuit of ultimate happiness in behalf of every intelligent being in the creation, obedient or rebellious, penitent or impenitent, men or devils. In this sense I allow that the glory of God may be at variance with the happiness of creatures, and I contend, that where it is so, the latter, and not the former, ought to be given up.

Mr. Kentish pleads from "the declaration of the favourite Apostle, *God is love*," and supposes, that "all his moral excellen-

* Pages 11, 12.

cies, as justice, truth, and holiness, are but modifications of this principle." To all this I have no objection, provided the object aimed at be the general good of the moral system. But Mr. Kentish supposes, if God be love, that in all he does he must have the good of every individual in his dominions in view. On this principle he must have destroyed Sodom and Gomorrha, Cain, and Balaam, and Saul, and Judas; and all those who, in every age, have lived *foaming out their own shame*, and to whom, according to the scriptures, *is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever*, together with Satan and all his rebellious legions, not only as examples to the intelligent creation, but *for their own good!* Surely this is not a necessary inference from the apostolic declaration. There are other cases, as well as this, in which justice may be a modification of love; but in no case does it require, that an incorrigible offender should not be punished but for his own advantage. The execution of a murderer may be an exercise of pure benevolence to the community, though of just displeasure to the criminal. The removal of a restless, ambitious, intriguing, and bloody-minded prince or princess from the earth, may be a mercy to mankind, and, as such, may be considered as an act worthy of *the God of love;* but it may not follow that this is accomplished in love to *the systematic murderer of the human race.* If all the West India islands were to be overwhelmed in some dire distruction, I am not sure that it would not be a mercy to the human species; it would terminate the miseries of thousands, and prevent the annual sacrifice of thousands more; and yet such an event might proceed, not from love, but from just displeasure to guilty individuals. It does not follow, therefore, from any principles with which we are acquainted, that because *God is love*, he must have the happiness of his incorrigible enemies in view, in all the displeasure which he pours upon them.

In order, it should seem, to obviate this reasoning, Mr. Kentish objects to our "thinking and speaking respecting the measures of the divine administration, as though they were precisely similar

to the measures which are pursued by earthly rulers."* It is curious to observe in what manner our opponents shift their positions, and veer about, as occasion requires. Dr. Priestley accused the Calvinistic system of representing God in such a light, "that no earthly parent could imitate him, without sustaining a character shocking to mankind." To this I answered, by proving that it is the practice of every good government to make examples of incorrigible offenders; and that benevolence itself requires it: yea, that there have been cases in which even a *parent* has been obliged, in benevolence to his family, and from a concern for the general good, to give up a stubborn and rebellious son to be stoned to death by the elders of his city, and that, not for his own good, but *that all Israel might hear and fear*. To this, Mr. Kentish replies, that God's government is not to be measured by human governments. First, then, we are accused of exhibiting the divine character in such a light, that it cannot be imitated; and when we prove that it can and ought, in those respects, to be imitated, then we are charged with thinking and speaking of God, "as one altogether like ourselves."

But, passing this, the point at issue is, which of the above representations of the divine character tends most to excite our *love* to him. Mr. Kentish conceives, that, as love to God arises from a contemplation of his goodness, his scheme must, in this instance, have the advantage. That depraved creatures, who care not for the honor of the divine government, but whose supreme regard is directed towards themselves, should love that being best, who, whatever be their character and conduct, is most devoted to their happiness, is readily admitted. But this is not the love of God. That goodness is the immediate object of love, I also admit; but goodness in the Divine Being is the same thing as moral excellence, and this renders him an object of love only to such created beings, as, in some degree, bear his image. The goodness for which Mr. Kentish pleads, is mere undistinguishing beneficence, of which we can form no idea, without feeling, at the same time, a diminution of *respect*. If a supreme magistrate should possess such an

* Page 20.

attachment to his subjects, as that, whatever were their crimes, he could in no case be induced to give any one of them up to condign punishment, or to any other punishment than what should be adapted to promote his good, he would presently become an object of general *contempt*. Or, if a father should possess such a fondness for his children, that, let any one of them be guilty of what he might, suppose it were a murder, a hundred times repeated, yet he could never consent that any punishment should be inflicted upon him, excepting such as might be productive of his good; such a father would be detested by the community, and *despised* by his own family.

But, perhaps I may be told, that the divine government is not to be measured by human governments; no, not by those which are *parental*. Be it so; indeed, I am willing to grant Mr. Kentish that it is not. If he can prove from *scripture*, that the divine government is possessed of this peculiarity, that, in every instance of justice, the good of the party, as well as the good of the community, is the object pursued, I will readily admit it, and will never mention its inconsistency with our ideas of government any more. But, while no manner of appeal is made to the scripture; while the numerous passages which I have alleged in favor of the doctrine of vindictive punishment, remain unnoticed; while nothing of any account, except the nature and fitness of things, is alleged; I have a right to show that, *from the nature and fitness of things*, no conclusion like that of Mr. Kentish can be drawn, but the very reverse. Love to a government, even a parental one, must be accompanied with *respect*. A being whose kindness degenerates into fondness, however his conduct may please our selfish humors, can never be the object of our *esteem*. On this principle, when Jehovah proclaimed his name, or character, to Moses, he not only declared himself to be *the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and in truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin;* but added, AND THAT WILL BY NO MEANS CLEAR THE GUILTY.

"Love to God," Mr. Kentish observes, "is no enthusiastic rapture, no offspring of a licentious imagination. It consists in the highest esteem for the divine character, and the liveliest grati-

tude for the divine mercies."* Very true ; it is the *character* of God that is the prime object of genuine love ; and I may add, what I have observed before, that " the true character of God, as revealed in the scriptures, must be taken into the account, in determining whether our love to God be genuine, or not. We may clothe the Divine Being with such attributes, and such only, as will suit our depraved taste ; and then it will be no difficult thing to fall down and worship him : but this is not the love of God ; but of an idol of our own creating." It appears, to me, that the God in whom Mr. Kentish professes to believe, is not the true God, or the God revealed in the Bible ; and that the love he pleads for, is no other than self-love, or an attachment to a Being whose glory consists in his being invariably attached to us.

The character of God is principally manifested to us through those two grand mediums, the law and the gospel ; but neither of them convey any such idea of him, as that which Mr. Kentish endeavours to exhibit. By the precepts and penalties of the former. Jehovah declared his love to men, as creatures, by guarding them against every approach to evil ; but he also, by the same means, solemnly declared his love of righteousness, and his determination to maintain a righteous government in the universe. By the *propitiation* exhibited in the latter, the same important ideas are repeated, and others, of still greater importance to us, revealed. Here, Jehovah declares his compassion to men, as guilty and miserable ; but it is without any relaxation of the rigid uprightness of his moral government, or the least implication that his rebellious creatures had been hardly dealt with, that he pours forth a rich exuberance of mercy upon the unworthy. He is still the *just God, and the Saviour ; just, and the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.* While salvation is promised to every believing sinner, damnation is threatened to every one that believeth not.

There is a rectitude that runs through all the dispensations of God, which determines his true character, and, by consequence, the nature of genuine love to him ; seeing the one must necessarily correspond with the other. The scripture-character of God

* Page 10.

is such, that wicked men are naturally averse from it. *The carnal mind is enmity against God.* Our Lord told the Jews, notwithstanding all their boasted attachment to God, that they *had not the love of God in them.* Hence, we are taught the necessity of the *heart being circumcised to love the Lord our God.** But the character of God, as drawn by Mr. Kentish, is such, that the most depraved being must approve it; and that, without any change in the unholy bias of his heart. *Sinners can love those that love them.* A being, the perfections of whose nature require him to promote the good of creation in general, will be loved by those, and those only, who value the general good, and who no otherwise desire the happiness of any creature, not even their own, than as it is included in the well being of his moral empire. But a being, the properties of whose nature prevent him, in any instance, from making a final example of any of his rebellious creatures, or punishing them in any way, except that in which their good shall be his ultimate end, may be beloved by those who have no regard for the general good, nor for any part of intelligent existence but themselves, or such as become subservient to themselves. And what, other than this, is Mr. Kentish's representation of love to God? Considering God as all goodness, and goodness as consisting in a determination to do good, ultimately, to every creature, let his character and conduct be what it may, he supposes it to be *natural* to men to love him. "The love of God," he says, "cannot fail to be *shed abroad in our hearts*: it is "naturally enkindled, and kept alive in our breasts."† Genuine love to God requires to be *shed abroad in the heart* BY THE HOLY SPIRIT: but there needs no Holy Spirit in this case; it is altogether *natural* to man: Mr. Kentish, therefore, acted very properly in leaving that part of the passage out of his quotation.

The scheme of our opponents not only misrepresents the *nature* of love to God, but is miserably deficient with respect to *motives* whereby it may be excited. *God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.—Herein is love, not that we loved*

* Rom. viii. 7. John v. 42. Deut. xxx. 6. † Pages 11, 12.

*God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins.—God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.—He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all.—Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.** Such is the language of inspiration ; but this affecting epitome of gospel-truth is despoiled of all its glory by the expositions of our opponents. Every thing rich, interesting, and endearing, which it contains, evaporates in their hands, as by a kind of chymical process ; and nothing is left behind that can acquit the sacred writers of dealing in great swelling words of vanity.

Mr. Kentish's remarks upon this subject, together with a quotation from Dr. Kippis, in support of it, are feeble and nugatory : they prove nothing, but the poverty of the cause. "By the goodness of the Almighty, exhibited in the works of nature, in the dispensation of providence, and in our temporal comfort, we are as much impressed, I presume," says Mr. Kentish, "as any class of Christians. And, if we neither think nor speak like some of them concerning the divine love manifested in the gift of Jesus Christ, it must not hence be inferred, that we are less attentive to its magnitude and extent. It is our persuasion, on the contrary, that from the view we cherish of this important subject, we can say with peculiar justice, *We love him because he first loved us.*"† To the "persuasion" of Mr. Kentish is added the *opinion* of Dr. Kippis, that, when "writers express themselves as if the Christian revelation would be of little value, unless their particular systems are adopted, it is a kind of language which is extremely injudicious, and which ought to be avoided and discouraged ; and that no man can think meanly of the evangelical dispensation, or detract from its excellence and dignity, who believes that God is the author of it—that it was communicated by Jesus Christ—and that he conveys to us knowledge, pardon, holiness, and eternal life."‡ Our opponents, then, in all their numerous charges of *idolatry*, *corrupting Christianity*, &c. exhibited against us, wish to be understood, it seems, after all, as concluding nothing

* John iii. 16. 1 John iv. 10 Rom. v. 8, viii. 32. 2 Cor. ix. 15.

† Pages 12. 13. ‡ Pages 12, 13. Note.

under these offensive terms, which implies "a mean opinion of the evangelical dispensation, or which detracts from its excellence and dignity!" I wish it were in my power honestly to return the compliment. In this case, however, I should think, consistency would require me to retract my former charges. But, were Calvinists and Socinians to coalesce, upon Dr. Kippis's principles, I should fear it would deserve the name of a *confederacy* against the holy scriptures. The Apostle Paul must necessarily fall under their united censure; for, if it be "extremely injudicious to represent the Christian revelation as of little value, unless a particular system be adopted," he must have been very guilty, in suggesting that the Galatian teachers, who only erred on the doctrine of justification, had introduced *another gospel*, and aimed at *perverting the gospel of Christ*. But, if the scheme of Mr. Kentish be defective in one point of view, he seems to think it has the advantage in another.

The *unity* of God, he observes, stands connected with the command to love him; and labours from hence, to prove the superior efficacy of his sentiments in *promoting* this temper of mind; inasmuch as they who imbibe them are not subject to be distracted and bewildered in their worship, as those are who worship a plurality of deities.* But with this reasoning I, who do not worship a plurality of deities, have no concern.

Under the article of *Love to God*, Mr. Kentish proceeds to discourse on *love to Christ*.† With what "propriety" this is done, unless he be possessed of Deity, I shall not inquire. It is in this place, I suppose, that we are to consider him as answering my eleventh Letter, which was written on this subject. The questions discussed in that letter were, "Which of the two systems tend most to exalt the character of Christ? Which places his mediation in the most important view? And which represents us as most indebted to his undertaking?" The substance of Mr Kentish's remarks, on the first of these questions, consists in this: that it is not *greatness*, but *goodness*, that is the object of love; that "love to Christ has its just foundation, not in a persuasion of his superior dignity, but in a conviction that his character was

* Pages 14, 15. † Pages 15—19.

distinguished by the 'beauty of holiness,' or the charms of virtue."* I allow, that goodness, and not greatness is the immediate object of love: but Mr. Kentish will also allow, that the latter renders a being *capable* of the former. The more enlargedness of mind any person possesses, the more capable he is of goodness; and, if his moral qualities keep pace with his natural accomplishments, he is a more estimable character than if his mind were not enlarged.

The greater any character is, therefore, if his goodness be but equal to his greatness, the more he becomes the proper object of love. Will Mr. Kentish pretend that the "charms of virtue," in a good man, (in Jesus Christ for example, supposing him to be only a good man,) ought to render him as much the object of our affection, as the infinitely glorious moral excellence of the Divine Being ought to render him? But, by how much the character of the Divine Being is more estimable than that of the best of men, by so much is the character of Christ more estimable, upon the supposition of his proper deity, than that of his being merely human.

Mr. Kentish, as though he felt this difficulty, and wished to remove it, suggests, that it is upon the principle of *gratitude* that we "give to God, the supreme author of our enjoyments, our highest, purest love."† But it is gratitude *only*, that binds us to love God better than a creature? It is merely because we receive more from him? It is not also on account of the infinite amiableness of his moral character, as displayed particularly in the gospel, or, (as the scriptures express it,) *of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ?* Yea, is it not, *primarily*, on this account, that God is entitled to our "highest and purest love?"

Mr. Kentish has not thought it proper to enter on the inquiries, "Which of the two systems places the mediation of Christ in the most important light; and which represents us as most indebted to his undertaking?" He has made some observations, however, upon *gratitude*. Having stated, that God is to be loved, on this principle, with our highest, purest love, he adds, "Hence, too, we cannot avoid indulging and showing affection for those of our

* Page 16. † Page 17.

fellow-creatures whom he disposes and enables to do us good; and who, in truth, are but the instruments of his bounty. It is upon the same principle, that we perceive the justice of manifesting no common love to Christ, the author, under God, of our most valuable privileges and our richest blessings."* Whether the love of our opponents towards Christ, in a way of gratitude, be common, or uncommon, while they maintain that he existed not till he was born of Mary, they cannot consider themselves as under any obligation to him for *coming into the world to save them;* seeing that was a matter in which he must have been totally *involuntary*, and while they reject the doctrine of the *atonement*, I do not see how they can feel obliged to *him* for the forgiveness of their sins; or to any thing which he has done, or suffered, for their hopes of eternal life. They may feel indebted to him for having *published* these doctrines: but, if this be all, it is a small affair for so much to be made of it. Many a prophet, who was a bearer of heavy tidings, would have been glad, in this respect, to exchange messages with him. Dr. Toulmin, in a former publication, has tried to magnify this subject a little, by alleging, that "Christ came not only to *preach* the doctrine of a future state, but to *prove* it, and to furnish a *pledge* of the resurrection to eternal life, by his own resurrection."† Dr. Toulmin has not informed us, in what manner the mission of Christ proved the doctrine of a future state, any otherwise than as his resurrection afforded a pledge of it: and this can add nothing, as a foundation of gratitude to him; inasmuch as, upon his principles, it was a matter in which he had no *voluntary* concern.

For our parts, we consider ourselves deeply indebted to Christ for his voluntary assumption of our nature: for the preference given to us before the fallen angels; for his condescending to become subject to temptations and afflictions for our sake, *that in all things he might be made like unto his brethren;* and for his offering himself without spot to God, as our atoning sacrifice, thereby

* Page 17.

† Dissertation on the Internal Evidences and Excellency of Christianity, Appendix I. p. 215.

obtaining the remission of our sins, and becoming the *foundation* of our hopes of eternal life: but none of these things have any place in the system of our opponents. And, though they would persuade us that they hold the sentiments embraced by primitive Christians, yet they cannot follow them in these important particulars. Their views of things will not suffer them to speak of his *taking upon him flesh and blood;* of his *taking upon him not the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham;* of his *being in the form of God,* and yet *taking upon him the form of a servant, and being made in the likeness of men;* of our being *forgiven for his sake;* or of *the promise of an eternal inheritance being received by means of his death.** According to their principles, his coming into the world was no act of his own; he had no existence, prior to his existing in flesh and blood; it was not a matter of choice with him, whether he would be made an angel or a man; he never existed in any other form, nor sustained any other character than that of *a servant*; his death had no influence on the forgiveness of our sins, or in procuring eternal life: none of these things, therefore, afford to them any foundation for gratitude.

The substance of this argument was stated in my fourteenth Letter; but neither of my opponents has thought proper to take any notice of it. It might be their wisdom to decline this part of the subject, which is so strongly supported by the express declarations of scripture.

Mr. Kentish seems to feel, that love to Christ makes but a diminutive figure in the Socinian scheme; and, therefore, apologizes for it. To suppose Christ to have been possessed of "a superhuman nature, and so to regard him," he says, "would be infringing upon our pious gratitude to the adorable Being whom we are commanded to love with an entire affection." To this I reply: Our belief of a doctine which our opponents will not allow us to believe, namely, the Divine Unity, enables us to repel this objection: we believe (and that, on the first of all authority,) that *Christ and the Father are so one,* that *he who hath seen him hath seen the Father;* and that *he who honoureth him,* in so doing, *honoureth the*

* Heb. ii. 14. 16. Phil. ii. 6, 7. Ephes. iv. 32. Heb. ix. 15.

*Father.** The idea thrown out by Mr. Kentish, and which enters into the essence of his system, is what the scriptures are utterly unacquainted with. They require us to love creatures in different degrees. But, inasmuch as this love, if carried to excess, would dishonour the Divine Being, these requirements are accompanied and limited by various cautions. Thus, we are required to love all mankind as our fellow-creatures; but we must take heed of improper attachment, lest we *worship the creature more than the Creator.* We are commanded to love and honour our parents; but, if they stand in competition with Christ, we are required comparatively to *hate* them. Christians are enjoined to love their ministers, who are over them in in the Lord: but, if even the servants of Christ be idolized, it shall be demanded, on their behalf, *Who then is Paul, or who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed? Was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?* We are doubtless, obliged to love angels, because they are our *brethren*, and are employed as *ministering sprits to the heirs of salvation;* but, if any attempt to worship them, they will profess themselves to be what they are, and direct to the worshipping of God.† Now, if Christ be only a creature, it might have been expected, that the numerous commands to love and honour him, should also have been accompanied with some such cautions; lest in complying with them, we should "infringe" upon the honour due to the Father. The great honour to which Christ was exalted, above all other creatures, rendered such cautions peculiarly necessary; since love to him would be in the greater danger of being carried to excess; and it is a fact, that the great body of those whom our opponents will allow to have been serious Christians, in almost all ages, have actually worshipped him as God. Yet there is not a single caution against this sort of excess, in all the New Testament; nor the least intimation, that, in giving glory to the Son, we may possibly "infringe" upon the glory of the Father. On the contrary, when the topic of love to Christ occurs, every thing is said to inflame it, and nothing to damp it. There is a becoming jealousy in the

* John x. 30. xiv. 9. 11. v. 23. † Rev. xxii. 9.

Divine Being expressed, in other cases, but never in this ; if any thing of this kind be expressed, it is on the other side. *If a man love me—my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.—If any man serve me, him will my Father honour.—The Father judgeth no man ; but hath committed all judgment unto the Son, that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.**

Mr. Kentish, as if he felt no pleasure in discoursing upon the character and work of Christ, as the grounds of love to him, proceeds to remark, with some apparent satisfaction, upon certain expressions of it. " From the lips of our divine instructor himself," he says, " let us learn—the lesson of love to him ; let us hence be informed, in what this principle consists. *If a man love me*, says Jesus, *he will keep my words.—He that loveth me not, keepeth not my sayings, Ye are my friends, if ye do whotsoever I command you.—These things I command you, that ye love one another.* Who can here refrain from observing, how truly rational is this language, how remote from mystery and enthusiasm ! But, while Christ declares, that such as obey his laws, as imbibe his spirit, manifest love to him, let none of his followers be so ignorant and presumptuous, as to insist upon other testimonies of affection to their master. Of better they cannot possibly conceive ; upon stronger they cannot possibly rely."*

I have no dispute with Mr. Kentish concerning what are the proper expressions of love to Christ ; but his insinuating, that to plead for his deity and atonement, as grounds of love to him, is to " insist upon other testimonies of affection towards him ;" testimonies which are " mysterious and enthusiastic," is calculated to perplex the subject. To say nothing of the " decency" of his pronouncing upon our conduct, in this instance, as " ignorant and presumptuous ;" it is but to manifest, that he wishes to confound the *reasons* of love with the *expressions* of it, and, under a show of regard for the one, to draw off the reader's attention from the other. Mr. Kentish may recollect, that the same language is used

* John xiv. 23. xii. 26. v. 23, 23. Pages 18, 19.

of love to God, as of love to Christ : *This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments : and his commandments are not grievous.** Now, an enemy to the infinitely-amiable moral character of the Deity, as the primary ground of love to him, might here exclaim, with Mr. Kentish, " Let us hence be informed, in what the principle of love to God consists : it is to *keep his commandments*. Who can here refrain from observing, how truly rational is this language, how remote from mystery and enthusiasm ! But, while God declares, that such as keep his commandments, manifest love to him, let none be so ignorant and presumptuous, as to insist on other testimonies of affection to him.—Let them not talk of " *contemplating* infinite power employed to execute designs which proceed from infinite benevolence, and of filial affection towards God, as enkindled by such contemplations."† Mr. Kentish would probably reply, to this effect : The *grounds* or *reasons*, of love to God are one thing ; and the appointed *expressions* of it, another : and your depreciating the former, under a pretence of exalting the latter, is as if you were to kill the root, in order to preserve the fruit. Such is my reply to Mr. Kentish.

From the love of God and Christ, Mr. Kentish proceeds to discourse on *the fear of God*.‡ I do not recollect having advanced any thing, in my letters, on this subject. I may observe, however, that the definition given of this virtue, does not appear to me to answer to the scriptural account of it. It is said to be " the veneration of infinite grandeur." But this approaches nearer to a definition of admiration, than of fear. The *moral* excellence of the Deity, as the object of fear, enters not into it; neither is there any thing of a moral nature included in it. Without taking upon me to define this heavenly virtue, I may observe, that a holy dread of offending God, or of incurring his displeasure, enters into its essence. The main objection that I feel to the scheme of my opponent, on this head, is, that the divine *goodness*, according to his notion of it, necessarily pursues the ultimate happiness of all creatures, pure or impure, penitent or impenitent, men or devils. This, as I have already stated, undermines that respect to the divine character, which is the foundation of both love and fear.

* 1 John v. 3. † Page 12. ‡ Page 19.

That God is the Father of all his creatures, is true ;* but it is also true, that he is a Father to those that believe in his Son, in such a sense as he is not to the rest of the world. The Jews boasted that God was their Father : but Jesus answered, *If God were your Father, ye would love me.—To as many as received Christ*, and no more, was *power given to become the sons of God, even to them who believed on his name.* This *adoption by Jesus Christ* is not the common heritage of men : It is a subject of special promise. *Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you and ye shall be my sons and daughters saith the Lord Almighty.*† And it ought to be observed, that it is this evangelical relation, and not that of creatures to their Creator, that converts our "afflictions into fatherly corrections." There have been characters in the world, of whom it has been said, *He that made them will not have mercy on them : and he that formed them will show them no favour.* These things ought not to be confounded.

After considering the fear of God, our author proceeds to discourse on *confidence in him.*‡ In this, as in most other of his discussions, Mr. Kentish appears to me to forget that he is a sinner ; representing the Divine Being, and his creature, man, as upon terms of the most perfect amity. His persuasion of the power, wisdom and goodness of the Deity, begets confidence. But nothing is said of his going to God, under a sense of his helpless and perishing condition as a sinner, and under the warrant of the gospel invitations : or of his confiding in him for eternal salvation. The confidence which Mr. Kentish describes, is more suitable to the condition of holy angels, than of guilty creatures, who have incurred the just displeasure of their Maker.

There is one subject included in the scripture exercises of devotion, which Mr. Kentish has passed over ; namely trusting in *Christ.* Under the article of love to God, he considered love to Christ ; and trusting in Christ is no less an exercise of Christian devotion, than love to him ; an exercise, too, with which our eternal salvation stands connected *In his name shall the Gentiles trust.—That ye should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted*

* Page 20. † John viii. 42, i 12. 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18. ‡ Page 21.

*in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.—I know whom I have trusted, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.** In my second Letter, I observed, that, upon the principles of our opponents, "all trust, or confidence, in Christ for salvation is utterly excluded." And how has Mr. Kentish answered in this charge? By passing it over in silence. This is a serious matter. O that for their own sakes, they could be convinced of the insufficiency of the ground on which they rest their hopes, and build upon the foundation that God hath laid in Zion! Uncharitable and uncandid as they consider me, I could water these pages with tears for them. My heart's desire and prayer to God is, that they may be saved. *But other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

From reasoning, Mr. Kentish proceeds to *facts*. He calls upon us "to show, that, as a body, they are less actuated than others, by the spirit of genuine devotion."† Mr. Kentish must be sensible, that private devotion is a matter that cannot come under public cognizance. In my VII Letter, therefore, which was written upon this part of the subject, I did not refer to facts, but contented myself with reasoning on the tendency of principles. It is a circumstance not the most favourable, however, to the devotion of Socinians, that persons, when they embrace their system, though they have previously been in the habit of praying to God, yet are frequently known, at that time entirely to give it up; or, if they practise it, it is by drawing up a written composition, and reading it to the Almighty. Such, I suppose, was Mrs. Barbauld's *Address to the Deity*, to which Mr. Kentish referred.‡ Though I have not seen it, I doubt not that it was an elegant composition; but whether there was any *devotion* in it, is another question. Sure I am, that such things are at a great remove from those prayers and supplications which abounded amongst the primitive Christians, and which have abounded among serious Christians of every age. Mr. Kentish should consider, too, that the principal part of what I have alleged, to the disadvantage of Socinian piety, is taken from the acknowledgments of their own wri-

* Rom. xv. 12. Ephes. i. 12, 13. 2 Tim. i. 12. † Page 22.
‡ Page 25, Note.

ters. He calls upon his "fellow Christians to show, that, as a body, they are less actuated than others, by the spirit of genuine devotion;" and from his fellow Christians, even in the strictest sense of the term, let him receive an answer. Dr. Priestley confesses, that so it *seems* to be; and Mrs. Barbauld, by manifest consequence, informs us, that *so it is*. "Calvinists," says the former, "*seem* to have more of a real principle of religion than Unitarians." "There is still apparent, in that class called *serious Christians*," says the latter, "a tenderness in exposing these doctrines, a sort of leaning towards them, as in walking over a precipice one would lean to the safest side." What is this but acknowledging, that *complete* Socinians *are not distinguished by their seriousness?*

Mr. Kentish next refers to *a number of characters* of his own denomination, who have been eminent for their piety.* Whether this account be liable to animadversion, I have no inclination to inquire. To animadvert on the characters of individuals, especially on those of the dead, is invidious; and it forms no part of my plan: on the contrary, as I have said before, I have professedly declined it. Let our opponents make the most of their piety; let them muster up all their force; let them claim those as Unitarians when dead, whom they refused to acknowledge as such while they were living,† I have no apprehensions as to the issue of the contest.

Our opponents, however, must not always be indulged in their pretensions. We cannot allow them, for example, to substitute *words* in the place of *actions*. If one on their side the question make a speech, or print a sermon, or a set of sermons in favour of morality, they seem to wish to consider it amongst the evidences of the moral tendency of their principles. It is not Dr. Priestley's writing *on the duty of not living to ourselves;* nor Mr. Turner's publishing a volume of sermons on moral subjects, though applauded by Reviewers, principally, if not entirely, of his own persuasion.

* Pages 23. 25.

† Dr. Priestley refused to acknowledge Dr. Price as a Unitarian, when they were engaged in controversy, though both my opponents place him in their list.

that will afford a "practical answer to my Letters on Socinianism."*

From the divine, Mr. Kentish proceeds to discourse on the *social* and *personal* virtues.† I perceive many things, in this part of his performance, which would admit of a reply; but nothing that requires any, except what he alleges on *the innocence of error.* "Liberality," Mr. Kentish observes, "inclines us to believe, that involuntary religious error exposes not men to the displeasure of their Maker."—And again, "We assert the innocence of involuntary error. It is the unhappiness of many professors of our religion, to consider it as partaking of the nature of sin. Such is the language they use in their writings."‡ Surely Mr. Kentish has not read what he has written against, or he must have noticed, that I also have acknowledged the innocence of *involuntary* error. Have I not said, "The *mere* holding of an opinion, considered abstractedly from the motive, or state of mind of him that holds it, must be simply an exercise of intellect; and, I am inclined to think, has in it neither good nor evil;"§ Does not Mr. Kentish know, that the ground on which I have supposed error relating to the gospel to be sinful, is, that it is *not involuntary?* Not that I accuse those who err of *knowing that they do so;* or of *avowing principles which in their conscience they do not believe*: this would not be error but gross dishonesty. Voluntary error is *that which arises from an evil bias of heart*, or a dislike to the truth. Such is the account given of certain characters by a sacred writer: *Because they received not the love of the truth—God sent them strong delusions that they should believe a lie.*‖ These men were not apprised of their being in an error; they believed their lie: but this belief arose from a dislike of truth; and it was this that denominated it voluntary, and sinful.

What is it that Mr. Kentish would persuade his readers that I believe? "The mere conclusions of the understanding," he says, "where the will is unconcerned, cannot surely participate of guilt:" and who thinks they can? "Guilt," he adds, "then, only attaches itself to error, when men wilfully and indolently refuse

* See "Wood's Sermon," for Turner of Wakefield, pp. 50, 51, Note.

† Page 25. ‡ Pages 29, 30. § Letter X. p. 176. ‖ 2 Thes. ii. 10, 11.

to employ the means of better information which are put into their hands."* Very well; and who imagines the contrary?

From these principles, which Mr. Kentish seems willing to have considered as the exclusive property of himself and his brethren, he proceeds to draw certain useful improvements: "By these considerations, my fellow Christians," he says, "we are restrained from placing ourselves in the chair of infallibility; from rashly judging upon the present state, and the future doom of our virtuous, though, it may be, mistaken brethren." Part of this is, no doubt, very good; it is highly proper, that fallible creatures should make no pretence to infallibility: but how can Mr. Kentish say that they do not judge upon the present state of others, when, in the same sentence, he pronounces some men "virtuous," and calls them "brethren?" Will he give the name of "virtuous" to every man in the world? If not, he occupies the seat of judgment as really as I do: his censure, therefore, does not affect my judging upon "the present state of men;" (for he does the same, and that in the same breath;) but my not acknowledging those as "virtuous, Christian brethren, whom he accounts so.

But, say our opponents, it is illiberal and presumptuous in you, to attribute men's errors on divine subjects to an evil bias of heart. *If they were not attributed to this cause in the scriptures, I grant it would be so:* but it is neither illiberal nor presumptuous, to view things as they are there represented. I have no more inclination, than Mr. Kentish, to occupy the "chair of infallibility:" but I consider it as a part of my proper work, and that of every other Christian, to *judge of the meaning of his decisions who does occupy it.* Produce me an example from the New Testament, of a single character who imbibed and taught false doctrine, and who was treated by the apostles as innocent. How different from this is the conduct of Paul, and Peter, and John, and Jude.† Nay, produce me a single example of error, in matters of religion, amongst good men, that is treated as innocent in the holy scriptures. Are not the tenets of some amongst the Corinthians, who denied the

* Page 31.

† Gal. i. 7. 8. 2 Thes. ii. 10, 11. 2 Peter, ii. 1. 1 John, iv. 6. Jude 4.

resurrection, called *evil communications, which would corrupt good manners?* Were not the errors of the Galatians called *disobedience* to the truth; and were they not reproached, on this account, as *foolish*, and in a sort *bewitched*, and as needing to have Christ *again formed in them?* Did not our Lord accuse his own disciples, whose minds were blinded by their notions of an earthly kingdom, with *folly and slowness of heart?**

In things purely *natural*, men may think justly, or make mistakes, without any degree of goodness on the one side, or evil on the other: and even in things of a moral nature, if our errors arose either from natural incapacity, or the want of sufficient means of information, they would be excusable: but never, that I recollect, do the scriptures represent errors of the latter description, especially those which relate to the gospel way of salvation, as arising from these causes. They teach us, that *way-faring men, though fools shall not err therein;* intimating that the errors which men make concerning the way of salvation, do not arise from the want of natural capacity, but of a *way-faring spirit*, or a true desire to walk in it.

I am not conscious of retaining any error, yet there is little doubt but that I do: from having discovered many in my past life, I have reason to suspect, that there are many more about me undiscovered. But, whatever they be, I suppose they are owing to some sinful prejudice of which I am not aware: and I know not that I am obliged to think differently of the errors of other people.

I perceive Mr. Kentish himself can omit the morality of opinion, where himself or a fellow-creature is the object of it. He pleads for liberality of sentiment, (by which he seems to intend an equally good opinion of men, notwithstanding their errors,) as a *virtue*, a virtue in which he thinks his brethren to excel. He must, therefore, consider its opposite as a *vice*, a vice which operates to our disadvantage. Now, I would ask Mr. Kentish, as before I asked Mr. Lindsey, "Supposing that I am in an error, in thinking amiss of my fellow-creatures, why should it not be as innocent as thinking amiss of Christ? Why ought I to be reproach-

* 1 Cor. xv. 33, 34. Gal. iii. 1. iv. 19. Luke xxiv. 25.

ed as an illiberal, uncharitable bigot for the one, while no one ought to think the worse of me for the other ?" I wish some one of our opponents would answer this question.

If "the language of *liberality* be," what Mr. Kentish says it is, "that *in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness, is accepted*," we can assure him, that we are not such strangers to it as he may be apt to imagine. Such language not only approves itself to our judgments, but rejoices our hearts. And, if *bigotry* be, as he defines it, "such an inordinate attachment to our own modes of faith and worship as prompts us to *have no dealings* with those who prefer others, to think of them with unkindness, and to act towards them with violence," provided he do not extend his *dealings* to Christian fellowship, which, according to his note in page 44, he does not, we can cordially unite with him in reprobating it. Liberality and candour, of this description, may exist, as Mr. Kentish observes, in harmony with zeal for religious principle.

But if *liberality* must incline us to treat errors of a moral and religious nature, especially those which relate to the gospel way of salvation, as mere mistakes of the understanding, "in which the will is unconcerned," it is a kind of virtue to which we make no pretence: and if bigotry consists in the reverse of this, we have no objection to be thought bigots, believing, as we do, that such bigotry is abundantly recommended in the holy scriptures.

But, "it is impossible, surely," says my opponent, "that, maintaining this opinion, they should regard the man whose religious sentiments differ from theirs, with perfect complacency, satisfaction and benevolence."* Where, then, did Mr. Kentish learn to confound "perfect complacency and satisfaction" with "benevolence ?" To exercise the former towards characters who renounce what we consider as the fundamental principles of the gospel, or even towards any man, but *for the truth's sake that dwelleth in him*, is, in our esteem, sinful: but the latter ought to be exercised towards all mankind, whatever be their principles or characters. I cannot be conscious of another's feelings; but, for my own part, I find no difficulty, in this matter, arising from my religious principles: and it is a satisfaction to my mind, to see not only

* Page 30.

the Apostle of the Gentiles ardently desiring the salvation of his countrymen, but my Lord and Saviour weeping over them; while each abhorred both their principles and their practice. If this be a "persecuting" principle, Paul, and even our Saviour, must both have been persecutors.

Mr. Kentish, having thus reviewed the social and personal virtues, calls upon "fair and unbiassed observation to determine, what is the character which they bear in their commerce with mankind." "If," says he, "it be not more exemplary than that of other Christians, it is not, perhaps, in any degree, inferior."* Mr. Kentish knows very well, that the authorities from which I drew a contrary conclusion, were no other than those of Dr. Priestley and Mr. Belsham. "It cannot be denied," says the former, "that many of those who judge so truly concerning particular tenets in religion, have attained to that cool, unbiassed temper of mind, in consequence of becoming more indifferent to religion in general, and to all the modes and doctrines of it." "Men who are the most indifferent to the *practice of religion*," says the latter, "and whose minds, therefore, are least attached to any set of principles, will ever be the first to see the absurdities of a popular superstition, and to embrace a rational system of faith." Such was the method in which these writers attempted to account for the alleged fact, "that Rational Christians were indifferent to practical religion:" This fact they could not deny; and, by attempting to *account* for it, they tacitly admitted it; yea, Mr. Belsham expressly grants, that "there has been some plausible ground for the accusation."

To the authority of Dr. Priestley and Mr. Belsham I may now add that of Dr. Toulmin and Mr. Kentish. The former, after the example of his predecessors, endeavours to *account* for their "neglecting the culture of the heart and affections;"† and the latter acknowledges, without scruple, that, "with less restraint than is practised by some of their brethren, they enter into the world, and indulge in its amusements."‡

But Mr. Kentish, though he grants the above, denies that there is any thing in it that can be fairly improved to their disadvantage

* Page 31. † Page 36. ‡Page 32.

"Unless it can be shown, "he says, "that we so use the world as to use it to excess, (referring to 1 Cor. vii. 31.) we shall take no shame to ourselves on this account." It is worth while to remark the *progress* which our opponents make in matters of morality. Dr. Priestley acknowledged much the same as Mr. Kentish, that "there is a greater apparent conformity to the world in Unitarians, than is observable in others; but he does not undertake to *justify* it: all he attempts, is to *account* for it in a way that might reflect no dishonour upon Unitarianism. He represents those amongst them, who, thus "lean to a life of dissipation," as being only "speculative Unitarians," "men of the world," and distinguishes them from "serious Christians." And when he comes to weigh the virtue of Trinitarians and Unitarians in a balance, he allows that conformity to the world, which is to be found in the latter, to be a detraction from their excellence; and only pleads, that they have other virtues which counterbalance it, or which, "upon the whole," cause their character to "approach nearer to the proper temper of Christianity than the other."* Mr. Belsham also, though he speaks of Rational Christians as having "often been represented as indifferent to practical religion;" and admits, that "there has been some plausible ground for the accusation;" yet does not *justify* it, but expresses a hope that it will be "only for a time;" and that, at length, those who give occasion for such accusations will "have their eyes opened, and feel the benign influence of their principles, and demonstrate the excellency of their faith by the superior dignity and worth of their character."† But how different from all this is the conduct of Mr. Kentish. Dr. Priestley *apologises;* Mr. Belsham *hopes;* but Mr. Kentish, despairing, it should seem, of things growing better, and refusing to "take shame on the account," boldly *justifies* it; yea more, suggests that such conformity to the world is "not only lawful, but deserving of praise."‡ This is carrying matters with a high hand.

* Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 100.

† Sermon on the Importance of Truth. ‡ Pages 32, 8.

From Dr. Priestley's account of things, one might have supposed, that, though there were "great numbers" of these conformists to the world amongst the Unitarians, yet they were a kind of excrescencies of the body, and distinguishable from it, as "men of the world" are distinguished from "serious Christians;" but, according to Mr. Kentish, it is their general character, and they are not ashamed of it; nay, they consider it as "not only lawful, but deserving of praise!"

That we are allowed, in the passage to which Mr. Kentish refers, to *use this world*, is true: men are allowed to form conjugal connexions, to buy and sell, and to rejoice in all their labour. It is necessary, however, that even these enjoyments should be chastised by an habitual sense of their brevity and uncertainty. That this, or any other passage of scripture, should be pleaded in favour of an *indulgence in the amusement of the world*, is beyond any thing that I have lately witnessed from the pen of a Christian minister.

My opponent proceeds to his second head of inquiry, viz.

"II. WHAT ASSISTANCE, SUPPORT, AND CONSOLATION, DOES THE UNITARIAN DOCTRINE AFFORD, IN THE SEASON OF TEMPTATION, AFFLICTION, AND DEATH?"

Mr. Kentish here quotes a number of scriptures, which allowing him his own exposition of them, can scarcely be said to express a single sentiment peculiar to what he calls Unitarianism. His whole aim, in this part of his subject, seems to be, to prove, that Unitarians may, by the principles which they hold in common with others, be possessed of something superior to "calmness of mind." I must say, I never saw any thing, in any of their writings, that appeared to me to bear any tolerable resemblance to the joy of the gospel. I admit, however, that what I have advanced on this subject, might have been better expressed. If, instead of affirming, that "the utmost happiness to which the Socinian scheme *pretends*, is calmness of mind," I had said, The utmost happiness which the peculiar principles of Socinians are adapted to promote, is calmness of mind, it would have been more accurate. My opponent's being obliged to have recourse to common principles, as the springs of joy and consolation, is a sufficient proof, that those

which are peculiar to his scheme, as a Socinian, were altogether unadapted to his purpose. He may wish to have it thought, indeed, that Christ's being "in all things made like unto his brethren," and his resurrection being that of *a man*, are terms expressive of his peculiar sentiments. So he insinuates.* But let any person consult the first of these passages ;† and he will find, that he who was in all things made like unto his brethren, *took not on him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham* : that is to say, he existed prior to his being a man, and was voluntary in choosing to assume the human, rather than the angelic nature. By culling single sentences, without taking their connexion, we may prove any thing we please : but in so doing, we abuse the scriptures, rather than interpret them. That the resurrection of Christ was the resurrection of *a man*, no one questions : but, to infer from hence that he was a *mere* man, is drawing conclusions which are not contained in the premises.

The scheme of our opponents is so far from being adapted to promote evangelical joy, that it leads them, in general, to despise it as enthusiastic. As an example of this, I cited the critique of the *Monthly Reviewers* upon President Edward's *History of Redemption* : and such examples might be multiplied almost without end. But, if men were not strangers to the sacred joys of religion themselves, how is it possible to conceive that they could despise them in others ?

The following head of inquiry is next introduced, viz.

"III. WHAT IS THE DEGREE OF EFFICACY WHICH THE UNITARIAN DOCTRINE POSSESSES, IN RESPECT TO THE CONVERSION OF PROFLIGATES AND UNBELIEVERS ?"‡

On another occasion, Mr. Kentish tells his auditors, that "concerning the natural influence of religious opinions, the world will judge, not from abstract reasoning and fancied tendencies, but from our dispositions and our lives ;"§ that is to say, from facts. But, on this subject, he has produced neither the one nor the other. "We claim to embrace," he says, "and allow no other doctrine than what Jesus and his apostles taught."‖ True ; but

* Pages 34, 35. † Heb. ii. 16, 17. ‡ Page 35. § Page 46. ‖ Page 36.

the question is, If their claim be admissible, how comes it to pass, that their doctrine has no better effect? Mr. Kentish answers, "The fact is to be explained by the prevalence of human corruptions." Is it a fact, then, that men are more corrupt amongst Socinians, than in those congregations where the doctrine of atonement through the blood of Christ is taught and believed?

But, perhaps, what we call conversion will not be admitted, by our opponents, as genuine. "We reject," says Mr. Kentish, "and reason and the scriptures, we think, authorise us to reject, every pretence to sudden conversion. True conversion from sin to holiness, we regard as the work of time and labour." If it were necessary to examine this subject, the conversion pleaded for by Mr. Kentish might appear as mean in our esteem, as ours does in his. But I desire no other criterion of true conversion in this case, than that by which *the end is accomplished.* Where I see a man turned from sin to holiness, I call him a converted man. That such a change is sometimes gradual, is admitted; but this is not always the case: neither was it in the primitive ages. I know very well, that Dr. Priestley, as well as Mr. Kentish, considers all sudden changes as nugatory, and supposes, that conversion is a work of time and labour. Upon this principle he affirms, that "All late repentance, especially after long and confirmed habits of vice, is absolutely and necessarily ineffectual." That our opponents should imbibe such an opinion, has nothing surprising in it; but that they should pretend, that the "scriptures authorize it," is somewhat extraordinary. Was not the repentance of Zaccheus, and that of the thief upon the cross, a late repentance, and yet effectual? Was the repentance of either of them the effect of long time and labour? Were the Jews under Peter's sermon, the jailor and his household, or any others of whom there is an account in the Acts of the Apostles, converted in the manner Mr. Kentish describes? If, however, the whole that was to be attributed to God, in this change, were no more than Mr. Kentish supposes; if it consisted merely in his furnishing us with "the powers of willing and acting;" it might well be considered as a work of time and labour; or rather, as a work that time, in its utmost extent, would never be able to accomplish.

But what end has Mr. Kentish to answer by his objecting to sudden conversion, and representing it as a work of time and labour? Does he mean to suggest, that their doctrine has not yet had time to operate? If not, what difference does it make to the argument? We call nothing conversion, amongst us, but that in which a change of disposition and life appears; and if this end were accomplished against them in any considerable degree, whether it were suddenly or gradually, he need not be at a loss for facts to support the efficacy of his doctrine. Instead of these, Mr. Kentish is obliged to content himself with *asserting*, that "Repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, rightly understood, have as intimate a connexion with their views of the Christian dispensation, as with those of their brethren:"—and with *hoping*, that "there are those in their number who have found the plain, the simple, yet the despised gospel of Christ, the power of God unto salvation."

I shall not controvert the remarks of my opponent respecting the Jews, and respecting unbelievers who reside in a Christian country. It is true, as he observes, "little can be said on either side, inasmuch as the experiment has never, perhaps, been fairly and entirely made by both the parties." Meanwhile, I perfectly acquiesce in the observation, that "eventually, without doubt, that representation of Christianity which has scripture, and," it may be, "antiquity for its basis; which is simple in its nature, and comfortable to our best ideas of the Divine character and government; will every where prevail."

On the subject of *Missions to the Heathen*, I have only to observe, that, if other Socinian writers had said nothing worse than Mr. Kentish, my remarks, on that subject, would not have appeared.

Lastly, Mr. Kentish proceeds to consider,

"IV. How far the admission of Unitarian doctrine is adapted to promote a veneration for the scriptures, and to fortify our faith in Christianity."*

* Page 38.

The principle which I assumed, at the outset of my inquiry on this subject, was this, "If any man venerate the authority of scripture, he must receive it *as being what it professes to be, and for all the purposes for which it professes to be written.* If the scriptures profess to be divinely inspired, and assume to be the infallible standard of faith and practice, we must either receive them as such, or, if we would be consistent, disown the writers as impostors." After stating this principle as the ground, or datum, of the argument, I proceeded to examine into the *professions* of the sacred writers. Now, I would ask Mr. Kentish, whether the above position be not unobjectionable as a ground of argument? Has it not the property which every ground of argument ought to possess, that of being admitted, or admissible, by both parties? And if so, why has he not joined issue upon it? I have no inclination to "view my opponent with the eye of jealousy and suspicion;"* but what motive can be assigned for his passing over this ground, and substituting, in the place of it, such a definition of veneration for the scriptures, as leaves out the ideas of *inspiration and infallibility?* It is true, he has used the former of these terms, but, it is manifest, that he considers the apostles in no other light than honest, well-informed historians. "To venerate the scriptures," says he, "is to receive and value them as containing a revelation of the will of God to man; it is to investigate them with diligence and impartiality; to interpret them fairly and consistently; to be guided by the natural, plain, and uniform sense of them, in articles of faith and on points of conduct.—Then, it should seem, do we entertain a just and correct wiew of their inspiration, when we regard them as the writings of men, who derived from the very best sources of information their acquaintance with the history and doctrine of Christ; of men whose integrity is beyond all question; of men who credibly relate facts and discourses, which either themselves witnessed, or which they deliver on the authority of the spectators and the hearers; and who faithfully teach that word of God, with a knowledge of which they were furnished by their master, and by miraculous communications subsequent to his ascension."†

* Page 45. † Pages 38, 39.

Whether this representation sufficiently expresses a proper veneration for the scriptures, is itself a matter of dispute. It is, therefore, very improper for a ground of argument, and especially for being substituted in the place of a position that was liable to no objection from any quarter. Why did not Mr. Kentish admit my general position, that, "If any man venerate the authority of scripture, *he must receive it as being what it professes to be, and for all the purposes for which it professes to be written;*" and why did he not, on this ground, join issue in an examination of the *professions* of the sacred writers? Such a conduct would have been fair and manly; but that which Mr. Kentish has substituted in the place of it, is evasive, and unworthy of a candid reasoner.

Mr. Kentish, having given us his *opinion* of the inspiration of the scriptures, and the veneration that is due to them, thus concludes, "If this be to venerate the scriptures, our principles, I must be allowed to think, are far indeed from being unfriendly to such veneration.* What does this conclusion amount to, more than this, That, if his notions of divine inspiration may be admitted as a standard; why, then their veneration for the scriptures will be found, at least in his opinion, to come up to it? Assuredly, the question was not, whether the veneration which our opponents exercise towards the scriptures, be such as corresponds with *their own notions* of their inspiration; but, whether it agrees with the veneration which the *scriptures themselves* require. Mr. Kentish must excuse me if I remind him of the resemblance of his conduct to that of persons who, *measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves amongst themselves, are not wise.*

But further, I am not sure that Mr. Kentish's conclusion will follow, even from his own premises. There is so much disrespect discovered, in the writings of our opponents, towards the holy scriptures, (of which I have attempted to give evidence in my XIIth Letter,) that even upon Mr. Kentish's own professed views, they come miserably short of veneration. Mr. Kentish acknowledges, that veneration "consists in being guided by the natural

* Page 39,

plain, and uniform sense of them, in articles of faith, and on points of conduct:" but the *Monthly Reviewers* assert, that "the nature and design of the scriptures is not to settle disputed theories, nor to decide on controverted questions, even in religion and morality—that they are intended, not so much to make us wiser, as to make us better; not to solve the doubts, but rather to make us obey the dictates of our consciences."* And how are all the subtractions of Dr. Priestley to be reconciled with Mr. Kentish's criterion of veneration? He supposes the sacred penmen to have written upon subjects "to which they had not given much attention, and concerning which they were not possessed of sufficient means of information." Mr. Kentish, it is true, may not be accountable for the assertions of the Monthly Reviewers, or of Dr. Priestley; but then his conclusions should have been more confined: instead of affirming, that, "if this be to venerate the scriptures, their principles are far from being unfriendly to such veneration,"—he should only have asserted it with respect to *his own*.

My opponent proceeds: "But, if reverence of these sacred records of our faith—is to be manifested by a dread of examining them, lest their doctrines be found in contradiction to our present opinions; or by a blind acquiescence in the unavoidable inaccuracies of transcribers, and in the no less unavoidable, but more injurious, errors of translators; or by a bigoted opposition to every attempt toward an improved knowledge and version of them; or by judging of the truths which they teach, rather from the sound of detached passages, than from the signification and tenor of the context; such reverence we disclaim. Sincerely attached to the sacred volume, against such reverence we stedfastly protest.†

But how, if reverence to these sacred records should *not* consist in a dread of examining them; or in a blind acquiescence in the inaccuracies of transcribers, and the errors of translators; or in a bigoted opposition to any attempt toward an improved knowledge or version of them; or in judging of the truths which they

* Monthly Review Enlarged, Vol. X. p. 357. † Pages 39, 40.

teach, rather from the sound of detached passages, than from the signification and tenor of the context? How, if this should prove to be a kind of reverence, for which Mr. Kentish's opponent does not plead any more than himself? And how, if our objections should not be against examination, but against the conclusions which some persons draw; not against correcting, but corrupting the translation; not against attending to the scope of the writers, but against torturing them to speak contrary to their real intentions? Will it not follow, in this case, that this "stedfast protest" is against a nonentity, that this mighty triumph is over a man of straw?

It is a usual way of writing, first to lay down a proposition, and then to establish it by evidence. In this manner I have generally proceeded. Mr. Kentish in quoting my language, has more than once taken simply the proposition, taking no notice of the evidence by which it is supported, and then accused me of dealing in peremptory assertions.* Such is his conduct in reference to what I have written on the tendency of Socinianism to Infidelity.† Mr. Kentish is welcome to call the positions which I have advanced "calumny," or by what other name he pleases; let but the evidence with which they are supported be considered in connexion with them, and, if they will not stand the test of examination, let them share the fate they deserve.

As to what my opponent alleges concerning what it is that denominates any one a professing Christian, and his appeal to the Acts of the Apostles,‡ I have already said what I judge necessary on that subject, in my reply to Dr. Toulmin; where also I have adduced some additional evidence of the tendency of Socinianism to Deism.

I have only one more remark to make on Mr. Kentish: it respects the meaning of our Lord's words in John xiv. 28. *My Father is greater than I.* The sense which has commonly been put upon this passage, both by Trinitarians and Anti-Trinitarians, appears to me to be beside the scope of the writer: nor is that of Mr. Kentish, in my judgment, more plausible. I agree with him, "that it is not the mere abstract doctrine of his Father's superiority, which he designed to assert;" or rather, I think that it expres-

* See pages 29, 35. † Page 40, Note. ‡ Page 41.

ses no comparison whatever between the *person* of the Father and that of the Son. The comparison appears evidently, to me, to respect *the state of exaltation with the Father*, and *the state of humiliation* which he then sustained. *If ye loved me*, saith he, *ye would rejoice because I said, I go to the Father; for my Father is greater than I.*—The glory and happiness which my Father possesses, and which I go to possess with him, is greater than any thing I can here enjoy: your love to me, therefore, if it were properly regulated, instead of prompting you to wish to detain me here, would rather incline you to rejoice in my departure.*

But, though I disagree with Mr. Kentish in his sense of this passage of scripture, I perfectly agree with him in the general sentiment with which he concludes his performance: that "the season may not be far distant, when systems which assume the Christian name, shall, like fabrics erected upon the sand be overthrown by a mighty fall"—but "that real Christianity has nothing to fear." And I may add, that it is with sacred satisfaction I anticipate the time, when all that exalteth itself against Christ, let it affect whose systems it may, shall utterly fall, and nothing shall be left standing, but the simple, unadulterated doctrine of the cross.

I shall conclude my reply, to both Dr. Toulmin and Mr. Kentish, with a brief *Review of the Reviewers*. What has fallen under my observation is contained in the *Monthly* and *Analytical Reviews*, and the *Protestant Dissenters' Magazine*.

In the *Monthly Review Enlarged*, my opponents had reason to expect, not merely a friend and patron, but a respectable and powerful ally. The managers of that work were parties in the controversy; as much so as Dr. Priestley, or Mr. Belsham, or Mr. Lindsey, or Mrs. Barbauld. They were called upon either to defend their allegations, or to relinquish them. But, like the late Empress of the North, by the allies, they have been a long time in raising their quota, and at last, have mustered up about half a dozen lines! In these lines, which are given in a Review of Mr. Kentish's Sermon, they have, with a design sufficiently apparent, preserved a sullen silence respecting the piece which gave occa-

* See Calvin and Henry upon the place.

sion for it. "From an impartial perusal of this sensible and well-written discourse," they tell us, "the candid reader may perhaps apprehend, that the important objects of piety and virtue may be advanced on the Unitarian plan, although he should not himself embrace it."*

Brief, cautious, and sullen, as this Review may appear, it is the best that my opponents can either of them boast. It is true, it contains merely *opinion;* and that is expressed in very general terms; but herein, for aught I know, may consist its excellency. The other Reviewers, as the reader will presently perceive, by descending to particulars, and attempting to back their opinion with *reasoning*, have ruined the cause, and injured those whom it was their intention to serve.

The *Analytical Review* of Dr. Toulmin's performance† is too long for insertion here. The substance of it amounts to no more than this: *that the ground on which I have conducted the controversy, is not a fair one.* But this implies a reflection on the wisdom of Dr. Toulmin, for pretending to meet me upon this ground; and a still greater reflection upon Mr. Kentish, for engaging upon it, and acknowledging, that, "in religion, the maxim, *Ye shall know them by their fruits*, is a maxim unquestionably of high authority, evident reason, and familiar application;" yea, more: that it is a criterion "by which the world will judge concerning the natural influence of our religious opinions." It also implies a conviction, on the part of the Reviewer, that his *cause is lost.* Like a second in a duel, he informs the world that it is no wonder his friend has fallen, for he fought upon unfair ground!

If this review has been of any use to Dr. Toulmin, it is by an attempt to *cover his retreat.* By raising an outcry, against the professed ground of the controversy, a kind of apology is formed for its being *shifted;* and the reader's attention is insensibly turned off from the Doctor's false reasoning, and reconciled to what he has advanced, foreign to the subject, from the Acts of the Apostles. But, whatever service might be afforded by this, it is all undone

* Review for January, 1797, p. 118. Article 74.

† Review for October, 1796, pp. 394—396.

by what follows: for, after having raised an outcry against reasoning on the ground of moral tendency, he discovers *an inclination to make the utmost use of it that he is able.* As Dr. Toulmin, notwithstanding his shifting the ground of the argument, has no objection to exhibit all the morality on his side, that he can muster up; so neither has the Analytical Reviewer any objection to repeat it after him. The one can tell of their virtuous individuals, and the other can echo the account; though both ought to have known, that it is not from the character of individuals, but of the *general body*, that I proposed to reason.

If the critique of the Analytical Review be weak, that in the *Protestant Dissenter's Magazine* is still weaker. This Reviewer observes, that "the method Dr. Toulmin has taken to show the moral tendency of Unitarian principles, is plain and solid; it is one recommended by his antagonist, an appeal to *facts.* He examines every specimen of apostolical preaching recorded in the Acts of the Apostles; each of which, he endeavours to show, is in unison with Unitarian sentiments. From this, the inference is very clear, that the world was converted, and the sinners of mankind were brought to faith and repentance, by the preaching of the simple Unitarian doctrine; directly contrary to what Mr. Fuller has advanced, that "Socinian writers cannot pretend that their doctrine has been used to convert profligate sinners to the love of God and holiness."*

Dr. Toulmin has appealed to *facts;* and it seems the writer of this article does not know but that they were *facts in point.* That they are not so, must be evident on the slightest reflection: for they can be of no use to Dr. Toulmin, unless he first prove, that the Apostles were of his sentiments: and, if this be proved, they can be of no use afterwards; because the point in question is supposed to be decided without them. Whether Dr. Toulmin was aware of this, I shall not pretend to determine: it is evident, however, that his affecting to join issue in an appeal to facts,† has every property of a *feint*, or of an attempt to keep up the appearance of a regular, pitched battle; while, in reality, he was affecting a retreat. But, whatever may be thought of Dr. Toulmin's acquainted-

* Review for October, 1796, p. 394. † Page 6.

ness or unacquaintedness with what he was doing, this writer appears to know nothing of the matter. He does not know, that the Doctor's repairing to the primitive Christians for examples of the conversion of profligates to the love of God and holiness, instead of proving "the direct contrary" to what I had affirmed, affords the strongest confirmation of it. It did not occur to him, it seems, that, if Dr. Toulmin could have found, or pretended to find, examples *near home, he would not have gone to so great a distance in search of them.*

LETTERS TO MR. VIDLER,

ON THE DOCTRINE OF

UNIVERSAL SALVATION.

ADVERTISEMENT.

A REVIEW of the Controversy between Mr. Vidler and Mr. Fuller, on the doctrine of Universal Salvation, in Twelve Letters to a Universalist, being prepared for the press, it was judged a fit opportunity for gratifying the wishes of many of Mr. Fuller's friends, to reprint his Letters to Mr. Vidler on that subject. He was accordingly applied to, for his permission, and returned the following answer:—"Mr. Vidler in a letter to me, signified his intention to print the whole controversy. As he has now, I should think, had sufficient time to fulful his proposal, and has not done it, you are at liberty to publish that part of it which belongs to me."

The reader is requested to notice, that the first of these Letters appeared in the Evangelical Magazine for September, 1795, and the seven following ones in the Universalist's Miscellany, between July 1799, and July 1800; and, that owing to this circumstance, the first Letter in the present series, was not numbered in that of the Universalist's Miscellany: but what is there called the *first*, is here the *second;* and so on throughout.

August 2, 1802.

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LETTERS TO MR. VIDLER, &c.

LETTER I.

EXPOSTULATIONS WITH MR. VIDLER, ON HIS HAVING EMBRACED THE DOCTRINE OF UNIVERSAL SALVATION.

My Dear Friend,

It has afforded me some painful concern, to hear of your having embraced the scheme of Universal Salvation. When you were at K——, you appeared, to me, to be of a speculative disposition. I have long thought such a turn of mind to be very advantageous, or very dangerous: persons of this description either make great advances in truth, or fall into great errors. I cannot, in this Letter, enter deeply into the controversy; nor is there any necessity for it, as I am told, that Dr. Edwards' Answer to Dr. Chauncey is in your hands. I earnestly wish you may read that piece with care, impartiality, and openness to conviction. I think you ought to have read it before you advanced your change of sentiment; and I greatly wish you had: for, though I do not question your openness to conviction, any more than that of any other person in your situation, yet I know something of what is in man: I know it it is a very rare thing *when we have once openly disavowed a sentiment, to return to it, and openly avow it again.* There are many instances of people, changing their principles, and there may have been instances of the other; but I do not recollect any. False shame, supported by mistaken pride, forms here a very pow-

erful temptation. The dread of being accused of versatility and indecision insensibly obtains such a dominion over the mind, as to blind it to one side of the argument, and to give efficacy to every thing that looks like argument, or the shadow of an argument, on the other.

It is certainly a very serious matter, that we *do not err* in our ministrations. Error in a minister may affect the eternal welfare of many. I hope I may presume upon the friendliness of your temper, while I expostulate with you upon the subject. I will not be tedious to you; but let me intreat you to consider the following things:

First: Whether your change of sentiment has not arisen from an idea of endless punishment being, in itself, *unjust*. If it has, consider *whether* this does not arise from diminutive notions of the evil of sin: *whether* you be not too much infected by sin yourself, to be a proper judge of its demerit: (a company of criminals would be very improper judges of the equity and goodness of a law which condemns them:) *whether* you do not hold a principle, from which it will follow that millions will be finally happy, who will not be indebted to either the grace of God or the death of Christ, for their happiness; and, consequently, must have a heaven to themselves, not being able to join with those who ascribe theirs to God and the Lamb. For, if endless misery be *unjust*, exemption from it must be the sinner's *right*, and can never be attributed to *mercy*; neither could a mediator be needed to induce a righteous God to liberate the sinner, when he had suffered his full desert. In fine, consider whether you do not contradict your own experience. I think you have told me of your great distress of soul, arising from a consciousness of your deserving to be cast out of God's favour, and banished forever from his presence. Can you *now* say, that you did not deserve this? Do you not deserve it still? If you do why not others?

Secondly: Consider *whether the genius of the sentiment in question be not opposite to that of every other sentiment in the Bible.* The whole tenor of scripture *saith to the righteous, it shall be well with him; and to the wicked, it shall be ill with him:* but Universal Salvation saith, not only to the righteous, but to the wicked, it

shall be well at last with him. Do consider, whether you can find any one scripture truth that resembles it, in this respect. What doctrine, besides this, can you find in the Bible, that affords encouragement to a sinner going on still in his trespasses; and which furnishes ground for hope and joy, even supposing him to persevere in sin till death? Instead of siding with God against a wicked world, as a servant of God ought to do; is not this siding with a wicked world against God, and encouraging them to believe, what they are apt enough to believe without encouragement, that *they shall have peace, though they add drunkenness to thirst? Wo is me*, said an apostle, *if I preach not the gospel? If an angel from heaven preach any other gospel*, he is declared to be *accursed!* Do seriously consider, whether the doctrine of Universal Salvation will not render your preaching *another gospel.* The gospel of Christ is *good tidings to the meek, healing to the broken-hearted*, and *comfort to them that mourn:* but must not yours be good tidings to the proud and impenitent, and comfort to those whom the scriptures declare under condemnation and the curse? The gospel of Christ is a system of holiness; a system entirely opposite to every vicious bias of the human heart; a system, therefore, which no unrenewed heart embraces: *he that believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God.* But the good news which you must publish, requires no change of heart, that it may be embraced; being just suited to the wishes of an abandoned mind.

Thirdly: Consider, whether your ministrations, on this principle, will not savour of who taught our first parents, *Ye shall not surely die.* If you should raise the hopes of the ungodly part of your audience, that, though they should live and die in their *filthiness*, yet they shall not *be filthy still;* though they go down to the *pit*, yet it shall not prove *bottomless;* though the worm may prey upon them, yet, at some period or other, it shall *die;* and though they may have to encounter devouring fire, yet they shall not dwell in *everlasting* burnings: if, I say, you should raise such hopes; and if all, at last, should prove a deception: think how you will be able to look *them* in the face another day; and what is still more, how you will be able to look HIM in the face, who hath

charged you to be *free from the blood of all men;* and to *say unto the wicked, it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given him!*

My dear friend! do not take it unkindly. My soul is grieved for you, and for the souls of many around you. How are you as to peace of mind, and communion with God? Beware of the whirlpool of Socinianism. From what I understand of the nature and tendency of your principles, it appears to me, you are already within the influence of its destructive stream. All who hold this sentiment, I know, are not Socinians; but there are few, if any, Socinians, who do not hold this sentiment; which is certainly of a piece with their whole system. It would greatly rejoice my heart to be able to acknowledge you, as heretofore, my brother, and fellow labourer in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Do let me hear from you, and believe me to be

Yours, &c.

Feb. 14, 1793. A. F.

LETTER II.

REASONS FOR NOT CONTINUING THE CONTROVERSY, AND REPLIES TO MR. VIDLER'S OBJECTIONS TO THE FOREGOING.

Sir,

In the year 1793, when I understood that you had imbibed the doctrine of Universal Salvation, I wrote you a private expostulatory letter, to which you returned no answer. You speak of this letter as being no secret in the circle of my acquaintance, I do not think it was shown to more than two or three individuals. Sometime after, as a request was made in the *Evangelical Magazine*, for some thoughts on that subject ; and as there was nothing private in the contents of that letter, I took the liberty to send it up for insertion. Accordingly, it appeared in the Magazine for September, 1795, under the signature of Gaius. To this Letter you have since written an answer, in the two first numbers of your *Miscellany*: I received, from you, a copy of those numbers, at the time, and, since then, another of the second edition; for both of which I thank you. To this I made no reply. In your second edition, you inform your readers of the case, and seem to wish much to know the reasons of my silence. Some of your friends in the country, possessing a little of the sanguine temper, perhaps, of your Birmingham correspondent, appear to have entertained a hope, that it was owing to the impression which your Letters had made upon my mind. If such be also your hope, I can only say, it has no foundation.

Whether the reasons of my silence be "cogent," or not, the reader will judge, when I have stated them. If I do not consider them as requiring a continued silence, it is because you have com-

pelled me to pursue a different conduct. To the best of my recollection, I had three reasons for not writing at that time :—

First : I did not know that it would be agreeable to you to insert, in your Miscellany, what I might write upon the subject; and though I considered the Evangelical Magazine as a suitable work for the introduction of a single piece, yet it did not appear to be a proper vehicle for a continued discussion, unless what was said on both sides were introduced.

Secondly : Though I was not very deeply impressed with the force of your arguments ; yet, being fully persuaded, notwithstanding what you say of the holy nature of your doctrine, that it needed only to be read by a certain description of people, in order to be imbibed; and not supposing your work to have a very extensive circulation at present, I thought it might be as well to let it alone. You may consider this, if you please, as an acknowledgment of the weakness of my cause.

Thirdly : Your two letters appeared, to me, to contain so many misapprehensions, and such a quantity of perversion of the plain meaning of scripture, that I felt it a kind of hopeless undertaking to go about to correct them.

I do not entertain a mean opinion of your talents ; but they are perverted by a system. You write as though you did not understand the plain meaning of words. I should not have thought, that, by saying, " I observed you to be of a *speculative* disposition," I should either have puzzled or offended you. I certainly did not mean, by that form of speech, either that you discovered a disposition " not to take the assertions of men as the rule of your faith," on the one hand ; or any particular " want of respect towards the sacred writings," on the other. I should not have thought of using such modes of expression to convey either of these ideas. If you choose to pay yourself such a compliment, or load yourself with such a censure, you are at liberty to do so ; but do not attribute either of them to me. You might have supposed, that I meant to exhibit no very heavy charge, nor, indeed, any charge at all, under this form of expression ; seeing I added, that such a turn of mind might be very *advantageous*, as well as very dangerous."

In suggesting, that "it is a serious matter, that we err not in our ministrations," I did not mean, either to take it for granted that you were in an error, or to prove that you were so; but, merely to bespeak your serious attention to the subject. Your stumbling at the threshold, in this manner, Sir, afforded but little hope, that, if I wrote, it would produce any other effect than a wrangle of words, for which I had neither time nor inclination.

The three questions which I put to you, and "entreated you to consider," were, it seems, totally irrelative to the subject, equally so as to "the doctrine of election:" yet you thought proper to offer answers to some parts of them, as well as to pass over others. Waving, for the present, the consideration of those parts which you have noticed, I shall remind the reader of a few things which you have *not* noticed, and leave him to judge, whether even they were totally irrelative to the subject.

You have not told us, that I recollect, whether you claim an exemption from endless punishment *as a right;* but seem to wish us to think that this is not your ground; especially, as you ascribe it to the death of Christ: (p. 10.) yet, in other parts of your Miscellany, I perceive the gift of Christ itself is considered as a *reparation for an injury*: (p. 69.) which affords but too plain a proof, that, notwithstanding all you say of grace and love, it is not on the footing of grace, but *debt*, that you hold with Universal Salvation.

Under the second question, you were asked, "What doctrine, *beside* that of Universal Salvation, you would find in the Bible, which affords encouragement to a sinner, going on still in his trespasses; and which furnishes ground for hope and joy, even supposing him to persevere in sin till death?" To this you have given no answer. Was this question equally irrelative to the subject, as to the doctrine of election?

Under the third question, you were addressed as follows:—"If you should raise the hopes of the ungodly part of your audience, that, though they should live and die in their *filthiness*, yet they shall not be *filthy still;* though they go down to the *pit*, yet it shall not prove *bottomless;* though the worm prey upon them, yet, at some period or other, it shall *die;* and, though they may have to encounter *devouring fire*, yet they shall not dwell with *everlasting burnings*: if, I say, you should raise such hopes; and if all, at

last, should prove a deception; think how you will be able to look *them* in the face another day; and, what is still more, how you will be able to look HIM in the face, who hath charged you to be *pure from the blood of all men!*" Was this equally irrelative to the subject, as to the doctrine of election? Yet to no part of this have you given any answer, except your attempting to explain away the term *everlasting* may be so called. You represent the whole of this third question as proceeding on the supposition of your denying *all* future punishment. But is not this a gross misrepresentation? Does not the whole foregoing passage allow that you admit of future punishment of a limited duration; and hold up, though not in the form of arguments, several scriptural objections to that notion? I consider this, Sir, as a farther proof of your talents for fair and plain reasoning being perverted by a system.

You appeal to the *scriptures*, and contend, that they no where teach the doctrine of endless punishment: yet you are aware that they *appear* to do so, and are obliged to have recourse to a method of weakening the force of terms, in order to get rid of them. It has been long the practice of writers on your side of the question, to ring changes on the words *aion* and *aionios*,—pretty words, no doubt; and, could they be proved to be less expressive of endless duration than the English words *everlasting* and *eternal*, they might be something to the purpose; but, if not, the continual recurrence to them is a mere affectation of learning, serving to mislead the ignorant. Be this as it may, this is an exercise which hardly becomes you or me. I shall only observe upon it, that, by this method of proceeding, you may disprove almost any thing you please. There are scarcely any terms, in any language, but what, through the poverty of language itself, or the inequality of the number of words to the number of ideas, are sometimes used in an improper or figurative sense. Thus, if one attempt to prove the divinity of the Son of God, or even of the Father, from his being called *Jehovah*, *God*, &c. you may reply, that the name Jehovah is sometimes given to things; as, to an altar, a city, and, once, to the church; therefore nothing can be concluded, from hence, in favor of the argument. Thus, also, if one go about to prove the omniscience of God, from its being declared that *his un-*

derstanding is infinite; you might answer, The term "infinite" is sometimes used to express only a very great degree; as when the strength of Ethiopia and Egypt is said to have been *infinite.* (Nahum iii. 9.) Again: If one endeavor to prove the endless existence of God, from his being called the *eternal* God, the *everlasting* God, &c. or the endless duration of the heavenly inheritance, from its being called the *eternal* life, an inheritance *incorruptible*, and that *fadeth not away;* you might answer, These terms are sometimes used to signify only a limited duration; and, that a thing, in common language, is said to be *incorruptible*, when it will continue a long time without any signs of decay.

The question is, *Could stronger terms have been used, concerning the duration of future punishment, than are used?* To object against the words *everlasting*, *eternal*, &c. as being too weak, or indeterminate in their application for the purpose, is idle, unless others could be named which are stronger, or more determinate. What expressions could have been used, that would have placed the subject beyond dispute? You ordinarily make use of the term *endless*, to express our doctrine: it should seem, then, that if we read of *endless* punishment, or punishment *without end*, you would believe it. Yet the same objections might be made to this, as to the words everlasting, eternal, &c. It is common to say of a loquacious person, He is an *endless* talker: it might, therefore, be pretended, that the term *endless* is very indeterminate; that it often means no more than a long time; and, in some instances, not more than three or four hours at longest. Thus you see, or may see, that it is not in the power of language to stand before such methods of criticising and reasoning, as those on which you build your system.

Admitting all that you allege in favor of the limited sense of the above terms, still the nature of the subject, the connexion and scope of the passages, together with the use of various other forms of expression, which convey the same thing, are sufficient to prove, that, when applied to the doctrine of future punishment, they are to be understood without any limitation.

If we read of a disease cleaving to a man *for ever*, the plain meaning is, *to the end of his life:* if of an *everlasting* priesthood, the

meaning is, one that should continue *to the end of the dispensation* of which it was an institute: if of *everlasting* hills, or mountains, the meaning is, that they will continue *till the end of the world;* but if, *after* this world is ended, and successive duration consequently terminated, we read, that the wicked shall go away into *everlasting* punishment, and that in the same passage in which it is added, *but the righteous into everlasting life;* (Matt. xxv. 46.) wo be to the man who dares to plunge into that abyss, on the presumption of finding a bottom!

The evidence which you offer of a *successive duration*, after this period, is a proof of the scarcity of that article in the paths which you are in the habits of tracing. A plain, unbiassed reader of scripture would have supposed, that the terms *day and night*, in Rev. xiv. 11, had been a figurative mode of expression, to denote *perpetuity;* and especially as the same language is used by the inhabitants of heaven, Chapter vii. 15. For my part, I confess, I should as soon have dreamed of proving, from what is said in Chapter xxi. 24—"The *nations* of them that are saved, shall walk in the light of the New Jerusalem," that mankind will maintain their present political distinctions in a future state, as of founding, upon such language, the idea of successive duration Your expositions on other parts of the Revelations are of the same description, as frigid as they are puerile. It is a wonder the New Jerusalem *coming down from heaven*, had not been supposed to have fallen into the *sea*, and to filled it up; and an argument been drawn from its great dimensions, of its being large enough to contain the whole human race. You must not be surprised, Sir, if I do not perceive the force of these passages, in proving, that all beyond the last judgment is not *proper eternity.* Yours, &c. A. F.

July, 1799.

LETTER III.

DIFFICULTIES ATTENDING MR. VIDLER'S SCHEME, AND ITS INCONSISTENCY WITH SCRIPTURE.

Sir,

You complain, more than once, of my not understanding the subject against which I write; and here, for aught I see, I must fall under. I confess I do not, nor can I understand what it is that you believe. Having heard and seen so much of your professing to hold the doctrine of *Universal* Salvation, *Universal* Restitution, and that "all men will be finally benefitted by the death of Christ," I really thought you had meant so; and could not have imagined, that, with these pretensions, you would have avowed the notion of annihilation. Hence it was, that in my third question, though I did not, as you allege, proceed upon the supposition, of your denying *all* future punishment, yet, I acknowledge, I did proceed upon the supposition that you hold with no other future punishment than what should terminate in everlasting life. And who could have thought otherwise? After all the information you have since given me, I am still so ignorant, as not to understand how all men are to be finally saved, and yet a part of them annihilated! Neither can I comprehend how there can come a time with sinners, when he that made them will *not have mercy upon them*, on the supposition, that *all punishment, of all degrees and duration, is itself an exercise of mercy.* (p. 10.)

Neither can I comprehend how you reconcile many things in your scheme with the holy scriptures. I have been used to understand the terms *death* and *perish*, being opposed to everlasting life, (John iii 16. x. 28.) as expressive, not of the loss of being, but of well-being. But with you they signify annihilation (p. 42.) The design of God, it seems, in giving his Son to suffer for us, was

not to save us from suffering, but merely from becoming extinct, and to perpetuate our existence. And the *death* which those who keep his sayings shall never taste, (John viii. 52.) means the same thing: they shall exist for ever; a blessing which your scheme makes equally applicable to many who do not keep his sayings as to those who do. And where do you find the above terms used to convey the idea of annihilation on any other subject; and from whence was this notion learned?*

When we are told that *God will not contend forever, neither will he be always wroth; for the spirit should fail before him, and the souls which he hath made*, (Isa. lvii. 16,) I supposed it had been meant only of them who, in the context, are said to *put their trust in the Lord;* and that in the present life, seeing it was promised them that they should *possess the land, and inherit his holy mountain;* of them who were of a *contrite and humble spirit*, and not of the *wicked*, who are likened to the *troubled sea*, for whom there is *no peace:* but you consider all these promises as belonging to the same people as the threatening in Chapter xxvii. 16. *He that made them will not have mercy upon them, and he that formed them will show them no favour!*

I observe, when such terms as *for ever* seem to favor your cause, they are to be taken in their utmost latitude of meaning. If it had been said of the Divine Being, he *will* contend for ever, you would have introduced your sing-song of *aionas* and *aionon*,† as sometimes meaning only a limited duration; but seeing it is said he will *not* contend for ever, here the word must be understood of duration without end. You must excuse me, however, if I for once avail myself of your critical labors, and remind you, that *for ever*, in this passage, refers merely to the present life, as the context plainly shows.

* The reader will perceive hereafter, that Mr. Fuller was mistaken, in supposing Mr. Vidler to hold the doctrine of Annihilation; this he acknowledges in Letter IV.—ED.

† Alluding to Mr. Vidler's quotation in the Universalist's Miscellany, No. I. p. 8.

I never imagined, till I saw it in the writings of Universalists, that *finishing trangression*, and *making an end of sin*, (Dan. ix. 24,) had any reference to what was to be done after the resurrection and the last judgment; and especially, since what is there predicted was to be accomplished within *seventy weeks*, or four hundred and ninety years from the time of the prophecy.

I have been used to think, that the mediation of Christ was not on behalf of fallen angels, whose nature he took not on him, of whose salvation the scriptures are silent, and whose own ideas are, that they have nothing to do with him. Matt. viii. 29. But, according to your reasonings, they also must be either saved or annihilated; yea, they must have, at least, the offer of salvation, otherwise their present and future sufferings would not be in mercy, which you consider as belonging to all punishment whatever.

It had been usual with me to think, that the triumph of mercy, in the day of retribution, as described in James ii. 13, Psalm lxii. 12. respected another description of people, than those who were to receive *judgment without mercy;* namely, those that should *so speak, and so do, as they that should be judged by the perfect law of liberty*, but you have found out a scheme, it seems, in which these opposites are united in the same persons; and in which the ungodly, while receiving *judgment without mercy*, have no judgment but what is *in mercy*. (p. 10.) Is it surprising, Sir, that a man of plain and ordinary capacity should be at a loss to understand such things as these?

It would not have occurred to me, that an argument could have been drawn, from the threatenings of God to Israel in the present life, (Lev. xxv.) to what shall be done to the ungodly world in the life to come; yet so it is: (p. 43) and the ground on which the analogy is justified, is the *immutability* of the divine character. But what the immutable character of God requires to be done, must be done alike in all ages, and to all people: whereas, what was there threatened to Israel, was not done at the same time to other nations, nor has it been done since to any nation beside them. (Amos iii. 2. Acts xxvii. 30.) There is nothing in it analogous to his dealings with mankind, unless it be the general idea of his "making use of natural evil to correct moral evil." This being

known to be the case on earth, you "cannot but think it must be the design of future punishment." Such is the whole of your argument, which you recommend to my "serious consideration!" But how, if, on the other hand, I should say, though natural evil be used on earth to correct moral evil, in society at large, yet it is not always sent for the purpose of correcting the parties themselves? We have no proof that the men of Sodom were destroyed by fire, or Pharaoh drowned in the sea, for their good: therefore, I cannot but think there is a similar design in future punishment.

I always supposed, that the sense in which God is said to be *the Saviour of all men*, especially of them that believe, (p. 44.) was that in which the Apostle there puts his *trust* in him; namely, as the God of providence, whose care is extended to all his creatures, but especially to believers.

I have read of the *dispensation of the fulness of times;* but the idea never occurred to me, that these times were to be understood of ages beyond the last judgment. I have no doubt but the "gathering together in one, all things in Christ, which are in heaven, and which are on earth," will be accomplished, and that within the limits of *time*. If it be done, as you allow it will, (p. 10.) by the time "that he shall have put down all rule, and all authority, and power, and shall have subdued all things unto himself," it will be done by the time he shall have raised the dead, and judged the world; for THEN is this work described as being accomplished. (1 Cor. xv. 24.)

In reading the account of the *new heaven and new earth*, in the 21st chapter of the revelation, I find, amongst other things, it is said, *there shall be no more death;* and afterwards, *no more curse;* but I should not have thought of these things being applied to the universe at large, but merely to the inhabitants of that blessed state; and the rather, seeing it is said, in the same chapter, that *the fearful, and the unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have* THEIR PART *in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.* Neither could I have supposed it possible, from such a representation of the *second death*, to conclude, that it consisted in annihilation.

By the *times of the restitution of all things*, (Acts iii. 21.) I have been used to understand the times of the resurrection and the last judgment: for that till then, and no longer, will Christ be detained *in the heavens*. Whenever Christ descends from heaven, then, according to Peter, will be the times of the restitution of all things; but this will be previously, and in order to his raising the dead, and judging the world, (1 Thes. iii. 16.) Consequently, these are the times of which the Apostle speaks. The utter overthrow which will then be given to the kingdom of Satan, by the general conflagration; (2 Pet. iii. 12.) the destruction of the last enemy, death, by the resurrection; (1 Cor. xv. 23. 26.) and the final adjustment of human affairs, by the last judgment; (Matt. xxv. 31—46.) will be *a restitution of all things*: the empire of sin will be crushed, and the government of God completely restored.

But the *times* in which your scheme is to be accomplished, must be after the final judgment; for, from that period, there is an *everlasting punishment* for the wicked to endure, a *lake of fire* into which they are to be cast; (Matt. xxv. 46. Rev. xx. 15.) and from which your restitution of all things is to recover them. Your restitution, therefore, and that of the scriptures, are not the same.

You cannot conceive of a restitution of all things, and of sin being *made an end of*, unless all the individuals in the creation be either reconciled to God, or annihilated: but what authority have you for such a construction of these terms? Did the *restoring of all things*, on the Messiah's first appearance, (Matt. xxvii., 11.) include all individuals, as far as it went? When God said to Zedekiah, *And thou, profane, wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end*, did it mean that he should be either converted or annihilated? (Ezek. xxi. 25.) And when the same language is used of the sins of the people, (Chap. xxv. 5.) does it mean that they should be either converted or annihilated? Rather, is it not manifest, that, by *iniquity having an end* is meant, that the perpetrators of it were brought to condign punishment, shut up in Babylon, as in a prison, and rendered incapable of doing farther mischief? Such will be the case with all the ungodly, at the second coming of Christ; and this will be the restoration of peace, order, and happiness, to the rest of the universe.

The doctrine of endless misery appears, to you, to "confound all degrees of punishment, in giving infinite punishment to all." (p. 42.) You, it seems, can conceive of no diversity of suffering, unless it be in duration. Will the reflection of lost souls on their past life, then, be all exactly the same?—the same in the objects reflected on; and, consequently, the same in the intenseness of their misery? How grossly absurd, Sir, must be your notions of future punishment, to admit of such an idea! Besides, there is equal reason to believe, that there will be different degrees of glory, as of misery. If heavenly bliss bear any relation to the labours and sufferings of the present life on behalf of Christ, which the scriptures assure us it does, (Matt. v. 12. 2 Cor. iv. 17.) these being diverse, that must also be the same. But, according to your reasoning, there can be no diversity, unless it be in duration: either, therefore, all degrees of happiness, must be confounded, in giving happiness to all; or the inhabitants of heaven, as well as those of hell, must, after a certain period, be continually diminishing by annihilation.

Such, Sir, are your expositions of scripture. Except in the productions of a certain maniac in our own country, I never recollect to have seen so much violence done to the word of God in so small a compass.

According to your scheme, all things work together for good to them that love not God, as well as to them that love him. Thus you confound what the scriptures discriminate.

Our Lord told the Jews, that, if they believed not that he was the Messiah, they should *die in their sins*, and whither he went they *could not come*: (John viii. 21.) but, according to your scheme, they might die in their sins, and yet be able to go whither he went, and inherit eternal life.

The scriptures describe a sort of characters who shall be exposed to *a certain fearful looking for of judgment*: (Heb. x. 27.) but this, according to your scheme, can be nothing more than annihilation. For, as the case of the characters described is suggested to be irrevocable and hopeless, they cannot be punished, during ages of ages, *in a way of mercy*, or with a view to their recovery: and as to their being punished during this long period, and, in the

end, annihilated, this would be contrary to all your ideas of punishment, which must always have its foundation in mercy. Hence it follows, that all this fearful looking for of judgment amounts to no more than what Atheists and Infidels generally prefer; death being, to them, an *everlasting sleep*.

Nor is your hypothesis less at variance with itself, than with the holy scriptures. Your notion of *temporary punishment* clashes with all your arguments drawn from the benevolent feelings of a good man. You ask, "Doth not every good man love his enemies, and forgive even the worst of them? Is there a man living, whose heart is filled with the love of God, that would not promote the best interest of his most inveterate foe, if it lay in his power? And has not God more love than the best of men? And are not his wisdom and his power equal to his love?" (p. 74.)

In return, I ask, Is there a man living, whose heart is filled with the love of God, who would be willing that his worst enemy should be cast into hell for ages of ages, or for a single age, or even a single day, when it was in his power to deliver him from it? But God hath more love than the best of men; and his wisdom and power are equal to his love: consequently, there will be no future punishment!

Your notion of annihilation will also contradict the greater part of your pretensions. You talk of *universal* salvation; but you do not believe it: for a part of the human race are to be given up, as incurables, to annihilation. You plead the 5th chapter to the Romans, in favour of your doctrine; contending that *justification of life* will be as extensive as *condemnation*: but you believe no such thing; for a part of those who are condemned, instead of being justified and saved, will be given up, as incurables, to annihilation. You think you see *times* beyond the last judgment, in which *all* things, or, rather, as you understand it, *all persons*, are to be gathered together in Christ, and reconciled by the blood of his cross: howbeit, you mean not so, neither doth your heart think so; for a part of them will be struck out of existence, who can, therefore, be neither gathered nor reconciled. You pretend to unite the opinions of Calvinists and Arminians: the former, you say, render the death of Christ effectual, but limit its design to a part of

mankind ; the latter tender it to all, but consider it as ineffectual ; while you maintain, that it is designed for all, and effectual to all. (pp. 70, 71.) But this is mere pretence: you believe no such thing ; for a part of mankind are to be, at last, annihilated. By an anecdote which you have inserted in p. 65 of your Miscellany, you flatter yourself that you have fastened a difficulty on a Mr. R——, from which he cannot extricate himself, but by embracing your doctrine. But neither could he, if he did embrace it ; for you no more believe that God will save all mankind, than Mr. R——.

You pretend to urge it, as a difficulty on me, that " either God *cannot or will not make an end of sin ;* that there is not efficacy enough in the blood of Christ to destroy the works of the devil ; or else, that the full efficacy of the atonement is withheld by the divine determination :" (p. 44.) But it is all pretence. If it be a difficulty, it equally bears upon your own hypothesis, as upon mine. If Christ died with an intention to save all, why are not all saved ? Why must a number of them be annihilated ? Is it because God *cannot* bring them to repentance and salvation ; or because he *will not ?* Is there not efficacy enough in the blood of the cross to destroy the works of the devil, without his having recourse to a mere act of power ; an act which might have been exerted without that blood being shed ? Or is the full efficacy of the atonement withheld by the divine determination ?

Yours, &c.

August 9, 1799. A. F.

LETTER IV.

REPLIES AND DEFENCES OF FORMER REASONINGS.

Sir,

I MUST be very weak, if, while writing in a publication, of which my opponent is the Editor, I should expect to have the last word. When I have said what appears, to me, necessary on any point, and on the whole matter of dispute, I shall leave it to the judgment of the candid reader.

From any thing I had advanced, you had no ground to conclude, that I formed an improper estimate of my own reputation. Any man, who has been in the habit of writing, and whose writings have been at all regarded by the public, must be possessed of some reputation; and, whether it be small or great, it is his duty not to make use of it for the propagation of what he believes to be pernicious error.

"Truth," you say, "courts the public observation of men:" and so may error. If it be true, that wisdom *crieth in the top of high places;* it is equally true, that folly is *loud and stubborn*. The advocates of Infidelity, Sir, are not less bold than yourself; nor less loud in their challenges of examination. Such challenges afford no criterion of truth: nor is it any proof of the goodness of a cause, that its abettors court the public attention. They may be well aware, that public prejudice is in their favour; or may entertain a much greater dread of sinking into insignificance, by neglect, than of being overcome in the field of contest.

You have repeatedly reminded me of the favour which you confer upon me, by permitting my papers to appear in you Miscellany. Now, Sir, I consider it as no favour at all; nor as affording any proof of your impartiality. If you think otherwise, you are

at perfect liberty, after introducing this series of Letters, to discontinue them. If I wish to write any thing farther on the subject, I shall not be at a loss for a proper medium.

"The prejudices of both professor and profane," you tell me, "are in my favour." Had you used the term *consciences*, instead of prejudices, you would have been nearer the truth. So far as my observations extend, the prejudices of the bulk of mankind are on the other side. Deists and libertines lead the way, by an open or affected rejection of all future punishment. Socinians, who generally include Universal Salvation in their scheme follow hard after them. Mrs. Barbauld, if I remember right, in her Remarks on Mr. Wakefield's Inquiry, goes so far as to represent the ideas of access to God through a mediator, and of punishment in a bottomless pit, as originating in the ignorance and servility of eastern customs. Unbelievers, it is well known, rejoice in the spread of Socinianism, as being favorable to their views; and Socinians rejoice no less in the spread of Universalism, as favourable to theirs. This is sufficiently manifest, by the applauses which writers on your side commonly meet with in the Monthly Review. There are great numbers of nominal Christians, of loose characters, who would be glad to believe your doctrine of temporary punishment, and to proceed, by easy transition, to that of no punishment at all; nor is there any bar which prevents their falling in with these views, but the remonstrance of their consciences. They fear it is too favourable to their vices to be true; and, therefore, are deterred from embracing it. Such, Sir, is the "description of people," after whom you inquire; such is the company with whom you associate, and to whom you administer consolation: and such is the justness of your remark, that "the prejudices of both professor and profane are in my favour." If you yourself had not been persuaded of the contrary, I question whether you would have given that title to my two first Letters, which appears on the blue covers of your work.* The word *torments*, it is true, can give no just offence, as it is a scriptural expression: yet, to persons who judge on these subjects merely by their feelings, the ideas convey-

* "Letter I. from Mr. A. Fuller, in defence of eternal torments."

ed by it, are sufficient to prejudice them against every thing which a writer may advance.

Your Magazines, Sir, I presume, would be less acceptable to many of your readers than they are, if, instead of employing so large a portion of them in attempting to prove that all will be finally happy, you were frequently to insist, that some men would be tormented in hell, without any mixture of mercy, for a number of ages; and if you insisted on this doctrine also, in your pulpit exercises, you yourself might possibly be considered, as a "brawler of damnation."

You carefully avoid claiming universal salvation *as a right*, and are pleased to represent my inquiry on that subject as "a quibble." I am not surprised, Sir, that you should feel reluctant on this head: that you should decline the defence of your friend, and that you should alternately compliment and reproach your opponent, as if to keep him at a distance from the subject. (No. I. p. 5. No. XXXIV. p. 309. If I mistake not, this is a fundamental principle in your system, and that which proves it to be fundamentally wrong. There is no need of having recourse to the pieces of other writers; your own productions afford sufficient evidence, that the salvation for which you plead, is not that which arises from the free grace of God through Jesus Christ; and, consequently, that is no part of the salvation revealed in the gospel. You reject the idea of invalidating the divine threatenings towards sinners, (No. XXXIV. p. 310.) admitting "them in their full latitude, and the execution of them too;" maintaining, that "God will deal with his creatures according to character;" and that "sinners will be punished according to their works." (No. II. p. 42.) Now, Sir, if there be any meaning in all this language, it is, That *justice* will have its course on the ungodly; and that whatever punishment they endure, whether it be vindictive or corrective, endless or temporary, it is all that their sins *deserve*. If the threatenings of God mean no more than a punishment which is temporary, and for the good of sinners, their conduct can deserve no more: for we cannot have a more certain rule of estimating the just demerit of sin, than the wrath of God which is revealed from heaven against it. But if

sinners endure the full desert of their sin, there is no room for grace, or *undeserved favour*; nor is any place left for the work of mediation. A criminal who has suffered the full penalty of the law, has no right to be told, that liberation is an act of grace, or, that it was owing to the mediation of another. Your Universal Salvation, therefore, is no part of that which arises from the grace of God, or the death of Christ; nor is it, properly speaking, salvation at all, but a legal discharge, in consequence of a full satisfaction to divine justice being made, by the sufferings of the sinner.

If you contend, that the liberation of the sinner is owing to the grace of God, through the mediation of his Son, which mitigates and shortens his punishment, then you at once give up all you have before maintained; That sinners will be punished according to their works, and that the threatenings of God will be fully executed upon them. You may have read of "instances of both punishment and pardon to the same person, and for the same sins:" (No. XXXV. p. 327.) but this must be where the punishment has not been according to the desert of the sin; otherwise there had been no need of pardon.

You talk much of my dealing in "*suppositions*, instead of arguments," and of my "resting my conclusions on unfounded assumptions."

I have carefully examined these charges, and am unable to perceive the justice of them, in a single instance. Though the Letter which appeared in the Evangelical Magazine, was chiefly in the form of supposition, yet that supposition was not destitute of argument to support it. It is possible, Sir, though it does not appear to have occurred to your mind, that arguments themselves may be conveyed under the form of suppositions. To convince you that this was the case, in the above Letter, I will put the very passage to which you object, into the form of argument.

The scriptures teach us, that those who, at a certain period, are found *filthy, shall be filthy still;* that they shall be cast into that *bottomless pit*, which was prepared for the devil and his angels; and that they shall dwell with *everlasting burnings.*

But your doctrine teaches, that though they be filthy at death, or judgment, or any other period, yet they shall not be *always so;*

that though they be cast into the pit of destruction, yet it shall not prove *bottomless;* and, that though they have to encounter devouring fire, yet they shall not dwell with *everlasting* burnings.

Therefore, your doctrine is anti-scriptural. But, if your doctrine be anti-scriptural, it is of that nature which tends to deceive the souls of men; and you will not be able to look them in the face another day, and still less HIM who hath charged you to be pure from the blood of all men.

The first three positions contain the argument, and the last the inference.

I should think, "the world," or rather the reader, did not need to be informed, what argument there was in this string of suppositions; if he did, however, I have attempted, at your request, to give him that information.

With respect to building on "unfounded assumptions," for which I am accused of "betraying my ignorance of the subject I have written against," (No. II. p. 45.) you have given us two instances, which I shall briefly examine.

First: I had asked, What doctrine, *besides* that of Universal Salvation, will you find in the Bible, which affords encouragement to a sinner going on still in his trespasses; and which furnishes ground for hope and joy, even supposing him to persevere in sin till death? What principle is it that is here assumed? Why, (you answer,) that the doctrine of Universal Salvation *does* afford encouragement to a sinner going on still in his trespasses, and *does* furnish ground for hope and joy, even supposing him to persevere in sin till death. And is this indeed a question? I took it for a self-evident truth, and sopposed you must and would have acknowledged it. Whether you will, or not, however, I appeal to the common sense of the reader, whether any position can be more self evident than the following: If the scriptures teach that all men shall be finally saved, every sinner, whatever be his vicious courses, is encouraged to expect eternal life: and, though he should persist in sin till death, is warranted to hope and rejoice, in the prospect of all being well with him at last. For any man to deny this position, is to deny what is self evident, and there can be no farther reasoning with him. To allege, in answer, That it

will be always ill with the wicked *while he continues so*, is trifling: for, if the sinner be taught to believe, that at some future period beyond this life, he shall be delivered both from sin and punishment; whether the former branch of this deliverance afford him joy, or not, the latter must.

The same question, you say, might be asked, concerning the doctrine of election. It might; but I should readily answer, No sinner, while going on in his trespasses, is warranted to consider himself as elected to salvation: therefore, that doctrine affords no ground of hope and joy to persons of this description. Can you say the same of the doctrine of Universal Salvation? If there were the same ground for an ungodly sinner to conclude himself elected, as your doctrine affords for his concluding that he shall be eternally saved, the cases would be parallel; and both these doctrines would be alike subject to the charge of comforting those whom God would not have comforted: but, as this is not true of election, your notion is still solitary, and your difficulty remains where it was. All the encomiums which you pass upon the Universal scheme, (No. II. pp. 41—44.) furnish not a single example of any other divine truth, which gives encouragement to a sinner, while in his sins, to believe, that in the end it shall be well with him. The question, therefore, still returns upon you, *What doctrine*, BESIDES *that of Universal Salvation, will you find in the Bible, which affords encouragement to a sinner going on still in his trespasses, and which furnishes ground for hope and joy, even supposing him to persevere in them till death?*

I do not say, "let the world judge," whether this question proceeded on any *unfounded assumption*, and whether it be equally applicable to election as to Universal Salvation; because I imagine, it will be but a very small part of the world that will examine our productions: but I am willing to make my appeal to the intelligent and impartial reader. And with respect to you, Sir, the task which you have set youself is before you; either, to "confess it to be true," that your doctrine gives encouragement, hope, and joy to wicked men; or to "expose the falsehood of this supposition more fully."

In the second place, you charge me with "taking it for granted, that your views invalidate the divine threatenings towards sinners; and intimate, that there is no "reason" in what I say, but upon the supposition of your denying "all future punishment." (No. II. p. 45.) That I never supposed you to deny all future punishment, I have already proved; and that any thing which I advanced required such a supposition, you have not, hitherto, made appear. As to your invalidating the divine threatenings, so far as the doctrine of Universal Salvation appears, to me, to operate in that way, so far, I must, of necessity believe that you do: but, whatever may be my belief, the question is, Have I built any conclusion upon it as an acknowledged truth? If so, how came I to *entreat you to consider whether it was not so?* Is it usual to entreat an opponent to consider, whether that which we take for granted as an acknowledged truth, be true? Undoubtedly, I suggested this idea to you, as being my judgment; which, however, I did not desire to impose upon you, any farther than as it was supported by evidence; and therefore, at the same time, intimated what was the ground of that judgment; namely, *the near resemblance between your labours, and to those of the deceiver of mankind.* If you cannot perceive this resemblance, I cannot help it. Other people can, and will. He persuaded his auditors, that though they should transgress, yet the evil they had dreaded would not come upon them: they believed, and were not afraid to transgress. You persuade your auditors, that, though they should die in their sins, yet the evil will not be *so great* as they had been used to apprehend: God hath not said, Ye shall die eternally; and he means that you shall all come where Jesus is. If they believe, must they not be *less afraid* of transgression, than before?

And now, Sir, Who is "ignorant?" and who has been employed in "raising a dust to hide the truth?" are questions which I leave you to resolve. It is enough for me, If I have proved your charges to be unfounded; for, if this be accomplished, your work still returns upon your hands; as it will follow, that, notwithstanding all your challenges, and calling out for more to be written, you have not yet answered the first Letter.

Yours, &c.

A. F.

LETTER V.

EVIDENCES OF ENDLESS PUNISHMENT.

Sir,

You seem to wish to persuade your readers, that the grounds on which I rest my belief of the doctrine of endless punishment, are very slender. The truth is, I have not, at present, attempted to state those grounds. Considering myself as not engaged in a formal controversy, I only introduced a few passages; and to several of them you have, hitherto, made no reply. The principal grounds on which I rest my belief of the doctrine you oppose, are as follow:

I. *All those passages of scripture which describe the future states of men in contrast.*

"Men of the world, who have their portion in this life: I shall be satisfied when I awake in thy likeness. The hope of the righteous shall be gladness: but the expectation of the wicked shall perish.—The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in his death. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. He will gather his wheat into the garner, and will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be who go in thereat; because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. Not every one that saith, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Gather

ye first the tares, and bind them in bundles, to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.—The son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnance of fire: there shall be wailing, and gnashing of teeth: then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net that gathered fish of every kind; which, when it was full, they drew to the shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, and cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world; the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Blessed is that servant, whom, when his Lord cometh, he shall find so doing: but and if that evil servant should say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming, and shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken, the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping, and gnashing of teeth. Well done, good and faithful-servant; enter thou into the joy of thy lord. But cast ye out the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping, and gnashing of teeth.—Then shall the king say unto them on his right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: then shall he also say unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.—And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into everlasting life.—He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.—Blessed are ye when men shall hate you for the son of Man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy; for, behold, your reward is great in heaven. But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation.—He that heareth my sayings, and doeth them, is like unto a man who built his house upon a rock; and when the flood arose, the storm beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it; for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like unto a man who built his house upon the earth,

against which the storm did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great. God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.—All that are in their graves shall come forth: they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.—Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory?—The Lord knoweth them that are his.—But in a great house there are vessels to honour, and vessels to dishonour.—Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.—That which beareth thorns and briars is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned. But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things which accompany salvation."*

I consider these passages as designed to express THE FINAL STATES OF MEN; which, if they be, is the same thing, in effect, as their being designed to express the doctrine of endless punishment: for, if the descriptions here given of the portion of the wicked denote their *final* state, there is no possibility of another state succeeding it.

That the above passages do express the *final* states of men, may appear from the following considerations:

1. The state of the righteous (which is, all along, opposed to that of the wicked,) is allowed to be final: and if the other were not the same, it would not have been in such a variety of forms, contrasted with it; for it would not be a contrast.

* Psa. xvii. 14, 15. Prov. x. 28. xiv. 32. Dan. xii. 2. Matt. iii. 12. vii. 13, 14. 21. viii. 11, 12. xiii. 30. 40—43. 47—50. xxiv. 46—51. xxv. 23. 30. 34. 41. 46. Mark. xvi. 16. Luke vi. 23, 24. 47. 49. John iii. 16. v. 29. Rom. ix. 21—23. 2 Tim. ii. 19, 20. Gal. vi. 7, 8. Heb. vi. 8, 9.

2. All these passages are totally silent, as to any other state following that of destruction, damnation, &c. If the punishment threatened to ungodly men had been only a purgation, or temporary correction, we might have expected, that something like this would have been intimated. It is supposed that some, who are upon the right foundation, may yet build upon it *wood, and hay, and stubble ;* and that the party shall *suffer loss ; but he himself shall be saved*, though it be *as by fire.* Now, if the doctrine of Universal Salvation were true, we might expect some such account of all lapsed intelligences, when their future state is described : but nothing like it occurs in any of the foregoing passages, nor in any other.

3. The phraseology of the greater part of them is inconsistent with any other state following that which they describe. On the supposition of salvation being appointed as the ultimate portion of those who die in their sins, they have not *their portion in this life ;* but will, equally with those who die in the Lord, *behold his righteousness, and be satisfied in his likeness.* Their expectation shall not *perish :* but shall issue, as well as that of the righteous, in *gladness :* and, though *driven away in their wickedness*, yet they have *hope in their death*, and that hope shall be realized. The broad way doth not lead to *destruction*, but merely to a temporary correction, the end of which is everlasting life. The chaff will not be burned, but turned into wheat, and gathered into the garner. The tares will be the same, and gathered into the barn : and the bad fish will be turned into good, and gathered into vessels. The cursed, as well as the blessed, shall inherit the kingdom of God ; which also was prepared for them from the foundation of the world. There may be a woe against the wicked, that they shall be kept from their consolation for a long time, but not that they *have received it.* Those who, in the present life, believe *not* in Christ, shall not *perish*, but have everlasting life. This life also, is improperly represented as the seed time, and the life to come as the harvest, inasmuch as the seeds of heavenly bliss may be sown in hell : and though the sinner may reap corruption, as the fruit of all his present doings, yet that corruption will not be the opposite of *everlasting life*, seeing it will issue in it.

Finally: Though they *bear briars and thorns*, yet their END is not *to be burned*, but to obtain salvation. To the foregoing scripture testimonies, may be added,

II. *All those passages which speak of the duration of future punishment, by the terms "everlasting, eternal, for ever, and for ever and ever:"*—

"Some shall awake to everlasting life, and some to shame and *everlasting* contempt.—It is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, than having two hands, or too feet, to be cast into *everlasting* fire.—Depart ye cursed into *everlasting* fire.—And these shall go away into *everlasting* punishment.—They shall be punished with *everlasting* destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.—He that shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit, is in danger of (or subject to) *eternal* damnation.—The inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrha are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of *eternal* fire.—These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest, to whom the mist of darkness is reserved *for ever*.—Wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness *for ever*.—If any man worship the beast, or his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture, into the cup of his indignation: and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone, in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up *for ever and ever:* and they have no rest day nor night.—And they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up *for ever and ever*.—And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are; and shall be tormented day and night *for ever and ever*."*

I have not mentioned Isa. xxxiii. 14, because I wish to introduce no passage, but what shall be allowed to refer to a future life. The Hebrew word עלם, in Dan. xii. 2. answers to the Greek αἰὼν; and, whatever may be said of the ambiguity of the term, the antithesis, in this passage, as in Matt. xxv. 46, determines it to

* Dan. xii. 2. Matt. xviii 8. xxv. 41—46. 2 Thes. i. 9. Mark iii. 29. Jude 7. 2 Peter ii. 17. Jude 13. Rev. xiv. 10, 11. xix. 3. xx. 10.

mean the same, when applied to "shame and contempt," as when applied to life.

As to the term αἰώνιος, rendered *everlasting*, or *eternal*, which you consider as proving nothing, on account of its ambiguity, there is a rule of interpretation, which I have long understood to be used on other subjects, by all good critics, and which I consider as preferable to yours. In my next Letter I may examine their comparative merits. This rule is, *That every term be taken in its* PROPER *sense, except there be something in the subject or connexion which requires it to be taken otherwise.* Now, so far as my acquaintance with this subject extends, it appears to be generally allowed by lexicographers, that αἰὼν is a compound of ἀέι, and ὤν, and that its literal meaning is *always being*;* also, that the meaning of its derivative αἰώνιος is *endless*, *everlasting*, or *eternal.* This term, αἰώνιος which is very sparingly applied in the New Testament to limited duration, I always take in its proper sense, except there be something in the connexion or subject which requires it to be taken otherwise: and, as I do not find this to be the case in any of those places where it is applied to punishment, I see no reason, in these cases, to depart from its proper acceptation. Everlasting punishment is, in some of them, opposed to everlasting life; which, so far as an antithesis can go to fix the meaning of a term, determines it to be of the same force and extent.

* Aristotle, the philosopher, who lived upwards of three hundred years before the New Testament was written, plainly tells us the meaning which the Greek writers of his time, and those who, in his time, were accounted ancients, affixed to this term. Speaking of the gods, whom he considered as immortal, and as having their residence above the heavens, he says, "The beings which exist there, neither exist in place, nor does time make them grow old; nor undergo they any change, being placed beyond the motion, even of those who are the farthest removed (from the centre;) but possessing an unchangeable life, free from all outward impressions, perfectly happy, and self-sufficient, they continue through all αἰῶνα, eternity. And this the ancients admirably signified by the word itself: for they call the time of each person's life his αἰὼν, inasmuch as according to the laws of nature, nothing (respecting him) exists out of the limits of it; and, for the same reason, that which comprehends the duration of the whole heaven, the whole of infinite time, and infinity itself, is called αἰῶνα, eternity; taking its name from always being, (ἀέι εἶναι immortal and divine."

To allege, that the *subject* requires a different meaning, in this case, to be given to the term, is to assume what will not be granted. The *proof* that has been offered, on this point, will be considered hereafter.

With respect to the phrases εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, *for ever*, and εἰς τὰς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰωνών, *for ever and ever*, I believe you will not find a single example in all the New Testament, of their being used to convey any other than the idea of endless duration. You tell us, that εἰς αἰῶνας αἰωνών, *for ever and ever*, in Rev. xiv. 11, should be rendered, "to the age of ages." Are you certain of this? Admitting the principle of your translation, some would have rendered it *to ages of ages:* but, render it how you will, the *meaning* of the phrase is the same. You might render it thus in other instances, wherein it is applied to the happiness of the righteous, or the glory to be ascribed to God; but this would not prove, that such happiness and such glory were of limited duration, or that the phrase in question is expressive of it.

To the above may be added,

III. *All those passages which express the duration of future punishment by implication, or by forms of speech which imply the doctrine in question.*

"I pray for them: I pray not for the world.—The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit *shall not be forgiven unto men*, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.—He hath *never forgiveness*; but is in danger of eternal damnation.—There is a sin unto death: I do not say that ye shall pray for it.—It is impossible to renew them again unto repentance.—If we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins; but a fearful looking for of judgment which shall devour the adversaries.—What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?—Woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed: it had been good for that man if he had not been born.—Their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.*—Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed; so that they who would pass from hence to you

* Several times repeated in a few verses.

cannot, neither can they pass to us, who would come from thence. He that believeth not the Son shall *not see life;* but the wrath of God *abideth on him.* I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall *die in your sins;* whither I go *ye cannot come.*—Whose *end* is destruction.—He that showeth no mercy, shall have *judgment without mercy.*"*

If there be some for whom Jesus did not pray, there are some who will have no share in the benefits of his mediation, without which they cannot be saved. If there be some that never will be forgiven, there are some that never will be saved; for forgiveness is an essential branch of salvation. Let there be what uncertainty there may in the word *eternal*, in this instance, still, the meaning of it is fixed by the other branch of the sentence,—*they shall never be forgiven.* It is equal to John x. 28. *I give unto them eternal life! and they shall never perish.* If there were any uncertainty as to the meaning of the word *eternal*, in this latter passage, yet the other branch of the sentence would settle it: for that must be endless life, which is opposed to their *ever perishing*; and, by the same rule, that must be endless damnation which is opposed to their *ever being forgiven.* If there be a sin, for the pardon of which Christians are forbidden to pray; it must be on account of its being the revealed will of God, that it never should be pardoned. If repentance be absolutely necessary to forgiveness, and there be some who it is impossible should be renewed again unto repentance there are some whose salvation is impossible. If there be *no more sacrifice for sins, but a fearful looking for of judgment;* this is the same thing as the sacrifice already offered being of no saving effect: for, if it were otherwise, the language would not contain any peculiar threatening against the wilful sinner, as it would be no more than might be said to any sinner: nor would a *fearful looking for of judgment* be his certain doom. If the souls of some men will be *lost*, or *cast away*, they cannot all be *saved;* seeing these things are opposites. A man may be lost in desert,

* John xvi. 9. Matt. xii. 31, 32. Mark iii. 29. 1 John v. 16. Heb. vi. 6. x. 26. 27. Luke ix 25. Matt. xxvi 24. Mark ix. 43—48. Luke xvi. 26. John iii. 36. viii. 21. Phil. iii. 19. James ii. 13.

and yet saved in fact ; or he may *suffer loss*, and yet himself be saved: but he cannot be lost, so as to be cast away, and yet finally saved ; for these are perfect contraries. Whatever may be the precise idea of the *fire* and the *worm*, there can be no doubt of their expressing the punishment of the wicked ; and its being declared of the one, that it *dieth not*, and of the other, that *it is not quenched*, is the same thing as their being declared to be endless. It can be said of no man, on the principle of Universal Salvation, that *it were good for him not to have been born ;* as, whatever he may endure for a season, an eternal weight of glory will infinitely outweigh it. An *impassable gulf* between the blessed and the accursed, equally militates against the recovery of the one, as the relapse of the other. If some shall *not see life*, but the wrath of God *abideth* on them ; if those who die in their sins, shall not come where Jesus is ; if their *end* be destruction, and their portion be *judgment without mercy ;* there must be some who will not be finally saved.

To these may be added,

IV. *All those passages which intimate that a change of heart, and a preparedness for heaven, are confined to the present life.*

" Seek ye the Lord *while he may be found ;* call ye upon him *while he is near* : let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts ; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him ; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.—Because I have called, and ye refused ; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded—I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh. When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind ; when distress and anguish cometh upon you ; then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer ; they shall seek me early, but shall not find me.—Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that shall be saved ? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate : for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When *once* the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying,

Lord, Lord, open unto us ; he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence you are—Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity—there shall be weeping, and gnashing of teeth.—While ye have the light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light.—While they (the foolish virgins) went to buy, the bridegroom came ; and they that were *ready* went in with him to the marriage, and *the door was shut.*—We beseech you, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain—Behold, *now* is the accepted time, *now* is the day of salvation.—To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.—Looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God—lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected : for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.—He that is unjust, let him be unjust still ; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still ; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still ; and he that is holy, let him be holy still."*

According to these scriptures, there will be no successful calling upon the Lord, after a certain period; and, consequently, no salvation. Whether there be few that shall ultimately be saved, our Lord does not inform us; but he assures us, that there are *many who will not be saved;* or, which is the same thing, who will not be able to enter in at the strait gate. None, it is plainly intimated, will be able to enter there, who have not agonized here. There will be no believing unto salvation, but *while we have the light;* nor any admission into the kingdom, unless we be *ready at the coming of the Lord.* The present is the *accepted time, the day of salvation,* or the season for sinners to be saved. If we continue to harden our hearts through life, he will swear in his wrath, that we shall not enter into his rest. If we *turn away from him who speaketh from heaven,* it will be equally impossible for us to obtain the blessing, as it was for Esau, after he had despised his birth-

* Isa. lv. 6,7. Prov. i. 24—28. Luke xiii. 24—29. John xii. 36. Matt. xxv. 5—13. 2 Cor. vi. 1, 2. Heb. iii. 7, 8. xii. 15—17. Rev. xxii. 11.

right. Finally: beyond a certain period, there shall be no more change of character; but every one will have received that impression which shall remain for ever, whether he be just or unjust, filthy or holy.

In this Letter, I have endeavored to state the grounds of my own persuasion: in the next, I may examine the reasonings and objections which you have advanced against it. The greater part of this evidence being taken from our Lord's discourses, who knew the truth, and was himself to be the Judge of the world, renders it peculiarly interesting. If a preacher, in these times, delivered half so much on the subject, you would denominate him "a brawler of damnation."

Yours, &c.

A. F.

LETTER VI.

REPLIES TO OBJECTIONS.

Sir,

In a former Letter, I suggested, that, whether the scriptures teach the doctrine of endless punishment, or not, they certainly *appear* to do so. Whether this suggestion was unfounded, the evidence in my last Letter must determine. You attempt, however, to discredit it, by alleging the few instances in which the terms *ever*, *everlasting*, &c. as connected with future punishment, are used in the scriptures.

"*Everlasting*, as connected with the future punishment of *men*," you say, "is used only *five* times in the Old and New Testament; and yet this same word is used in the scriptures at least *ninety* times, (very generally, indeed,) in relation to things that either have ended, or must end." You proceed, "As to the word *eternal*, which is of the same meaning, it is used in the text and margin upward of *forty* times in the whole Bible; out of which there are only *two* which can be supposed to relate to future punishment."* You should have proceeded a little farther, Sir, and have told us how often the terms *ever*, *for ever*, and *for ever and ever*, are applied to this subject; as the distinction between them and the words *everlasting* and *eternal*, is chiefly English, and as you have allowed, that it is from the use of the one, as well as the other, that I suppose the scriptures must "appear" to teach the doctrine of endless punishment. As a candid reasoner, you should also have forborne to mention Jude 6, with a view to diminish the number of testimonies; as it is not to the endless punishment of

* Universalist's Miscellany, No. XXXV. p. 328.

men only, that you object. By these means, your number would, at least, have extended to *eleven*, instead of *seven*.

But, passing this, I shall offer a few observations on your reasoning. First: If the term *everlasting* be applied to future punishment five or six times out of ninety, in which it is used in the scriptures, this may be as large a proportion as the subject requires. It is applied, in the scriptures, to more than twenty different subjects; so that to be applied five or six times to one, is full as frequent a use of it as ought to be expected.

Secondly: If the application of the term *everlasting* to future punishment only five or six times discredit the very *appearance* of its being endless, the same or nearly the same, may be said of *the existence of God;* to which it is applied not much more frequently. You might go over a great part of the sacred writings on this subject, as you do on the other: telling us, that not only many of the Old Testament writers make no use of it, but a large proportion of the New; that Matthew never applies the word to this subject, nor Mark, nor Luke, nor John; that it is not so applied in the Acts of the Apostles; and, though Paul once uses it, in his Epistle to the Romans, yet he closes that, and all his other Epistles, without so using it again; and James did not use it, nor Peter nor John, either in his three Epistles, or in the Apocalypse. And, when you had thus established your point, you might ask, with an air of triumph, "Is this a proof that the scriptures *appear* to teach" the eternal existence of God? Truly, Sir, I am ashamed to refute such trifling: yet, if I did not, your readers might be told, that doubtless, I had "cogent reasons" for my silence.

Thirdly: If any conclusion can be drawn from the number of times in which a term is used in the scriptures, that number should be ascertained from the languages in which they were written, and not from a translation, which, on such a subject, proves nothing; but, if this had been done, as it certainly ought by a writer of your pretentions, we should have heard nothing of number *two*, nor of number *five*.

Fourthly: You tell us, not only that "the word *everlasting* is used very generally indeed, in relation to things that either have

ended, or must end;" but that the word which is so rendered was, by the Old-testament writers, most generally so applied.* By "the word which we render *everlasting*," I suppose you mean עלם, though there are other words, as well as this, which are rendered *everlasting*, and this word is not always so rendered. I have carefully examined it by a Hebrew concordance, and, according to the best of my judgment, noticed as I went along, when it is applied to limited, and when to unlimited duration; and I find that, though it is *frequently* used to express the former, yet it is *more frequently*, applied, even in the Old Testament, to the latter. I do not allege this fact as being of any consequence to the argument: for, if it had been on the other side, it would have proved nothing. It would not have been at all surprising, if, in a book wherein so little is revealed concerning a future state, the word should have been used *much more* frequently in a figurative, than in a proper sense: but, as far as I am able to judge, the fact is otherwise.

In looking over the various passages in which the word occurs, I perceive, that, in many of those instances which I noted as examples of the limited use of it, the limitation is such as arises necessarily from the kind of duration, or state of being, which is spoken of. When Hannah devoted her child Samuel to the Lord *for ever*, there was no limitation in her mind; she did not intend that he should ever return to a private life. Thus also, when it is said of a servant whose ear was bored in his master's house, he shall serve him *for ever;* the meaning is, that he should never go out free. And when Jonah lamented, that the earth with her bars was about him *for ever*, the term is not expressive of what it actually proved, namely, a three days' imprisonment, as you unaccountably construe it;† but of what it was, *in his apprehensions*, which were, that he was cut off from the land of the living, and should never more see the light.

So far as my observations extend, the word, whenever applied to a future state, is to be taken in the endless sense; and, this you yourself will allow, *except in those passages which relate to future*

* Universalist's Miscellany, No. XXXV. pp. 328, 329.

† Universalist's Miscellany, No. I. p. 6.

punishment. You, therefore, plead for a meaning to the term, in relation to this subject, which has nothing parallel in the scriptures to support it.

In the New Testament, the future state is a frequent topic with the sacred writers; and there, as might be expected, the terms rendered *everlasting*, *eternal*, *for ever*, &c, are generally applied in the endless sense. Of this you seem to be aware; and, therefore, after asserting, that, by Old-testament writers, the term rendered *everlasting* was "most generally" applied otherwise, you only add, concerning New Testament writers, that they "use it but a few times in relation to future punishment; a remark, as we have already seen, of but very little account. If a particular term should be applied to one subject only five or six times, it does not follow, that the evidence is scanty. There may be other terms equally expressive of the same thing; and the foregoing letter, it is presumed, has given proof that this is the case in the present instance. And, if there were no other terms to convey the sentiment, five or six solemn asseverations on any one subject ought to be reckoned sufficient, and more than sufficient, to command our assent; and, if so, surely they may be allowed to justify the assertion, that the scriptures appear, at least, to teach the doctrine of everlasting punishment.

In answering what I considered as a misconstruction of a passage of scripture, (Rev. xiv. 19.) I suggested, that the phrase, *day and night* was not expressive of a successive or terminable duration, but a figurative mode of speech, denoting *perpetuity*. "It follows then," say you, "that your best ground for believing that there is no successive duration after the end of this world, is only a figurative expression or two."* Did ever a writer draw such an inference! What I alleged was, not for the purpose of proving endless punishment, but merely to correct what I considered as a misinterpretation of a passage of scripture. If this be your method of drawing consequences, we need not be surprised at your inferring the doctrine of Universal Salvation from the holy scriptures.

* Universalist's Miscellany, No. XXXV. p. 329.

I thought that you, as well as myself, had better not have attempted to criticise on Hebrew and Greek terms. You think otherwise. Very well: we have a right, then, to expect the more at your hands. Yet, methinks, you should have been contented to meet an opponent, who never professed to have a competent acquaintance with either of those languages, on his own ground: or, if not, you should either have assumed a little less consequence, or have supported your pretensions with a little better evidence. To be sure, it was very kind in you to inform me, that though αἰὼν and αἰώνιος agree in some respects, with the English words *eternity* and *eternal*, yet they will not always bear to be rendered by these terms. I ought equally to thank you, no doubt for teaching me, and that repeatedly, that, "as for the word *eternal*, it is the same in the original which is translated *everslasting*."* Seriously, may not a person, without pretending to be qualified for Greek criticisms, understand so much of the meaning of words, as to stand in no need of the foregoing information? Nay more: Is it not possible for him to know, that the Greek words αἰὼν and αἰώνιος will not always bear to be rendered by the English words *eternity*, *everlasting*, or *eternal:* and yet perceive no evidence of the one being *less expressive of endless duration than the other?*

This, if it must be so called, was my "hypothesis." To overturn if, you allege, that the Greek terms will "admit of a plural," and of the pronouns *this* and *that* before them; which the English will not.† So far as this is the case, it may prove, that there is *some difference* between them; but not that this difference consists in the one being *less expressive of endless duration than the other.* Words in English, that are properly expressive of endless duration, may not ordinarily admit of a plural; and, if this were universally the case, it would not follow, that it is the same in Greek. Nor is it so: for the idea of endless duration, is frequently conveyed by these very plural forms of expression. Thus, in Ephes. iii. 11. κατὰ πρόθεσιν τῶν αἰώνων; *according to his eternal purpose.* So also, in 1 Tim. i. 17. Τῷ δὲ Βασιλεῖ τῶν αἰώνων

* Universalist's Miscellany, No. I. p. 7. No. XXXV. p. 238.

† Ibid. No. XXXV. pp. 332, 333.

ἀφθάρτῳ, ἀοράτῳ, μόνῳ σοφῷ Θεῷ, τιμὴ καὶ δόξα εἰς τὰς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, *Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever.* Render these passages how you will, you cannot do them justice, unless you express the idea of unlimited duration. And though the English terms may not admit of what is termed a plural form, yet they admit of what is equal to it; for though we do not say *everlastings*, nor *eternities*, yet we say *for ever and ever;* and you might as well contend, that *for ever* cannot properly mean unlimited duration, seeing another *ever* may be added to it, as that αἰὼν must needs mean a limited duration, on account of its admitting a plural form of expression. You might also with equal propriety, plead for a plurality of *evers* in futurity, from the English phraseology, as for a plurality of *ages* from the Greek.

With respect to the admission of the pronouns *this* and *that*, we use the expressions, *this* eternity of bliss, or *that* eternity of bliss; nor does such language, being applied to a state of existence, express the idea of limitation. The very passage that you have quoted, (Luke xx. 35.) where αἰὼν is rendered *world*, and admits of the pronoun *that* before it, refers to a state which you yourself, I should suppose would allow to be endless.

For any thing you have hitherto alleged, the Greek words αἰὼν and αἰώνιος are no less expressive of endless duration, than the English words *everlasting* and *eternal:* the latter, when applied to temporary concerns, are used in a figurative, or improper, sense as, frequently as the former. And, if this be a truth, it must follow, that *the continual recurrence to them by your writers, is no better than a sing-song; a mere affectation of learning, serving to mislead the ignorant.*

You make much of your *rule* of interpretation, that, where "a word is used in relation to different things, the subject itself must determine the meaning of the word." (p. 333.) You are so confident that this rule is unobjectionable, as to intimate your belief, that I "shall not, a second time, have the temerity to reprove you for the use of it." If you examine, you will perceive, that I have not objected to it a first time yet, but rather to your manner of applying it. I shall take the liberty, however, to object to it now.

whatever "temerity" it may imply. I know not who those "best critics" are, from whom you profess to have taken it, but, to me, it appears disrespectful to the scriptures, and inadmissible. It supposes, that all those words which are used in relation to different things, (which, by the way, almost all words are,) have no proper meaning of their own, and that they are to stand for nothing in the decision of any question; but are to mean any thing that the subject to which they relate can be proved to mean without them. Had you said, that the subject including the scope of the writer, must commonly determine whether a word should be taken in a literal, or in a figurative sense, that had been allowing it to have a proper meaning *of its own:* and to this I should have no objection: but to allow no meaning to a term, except what shall be imparted to it by the subject, is to reduce it to a cypher.

But, exceptionable as your rule of interpretation is, in itself, it is rendered much more so by your manner of applying it. If, under the term "subject," you had included the scope and design of the writer, it had been so far good; but, by this term, you appear all along to mean, *the doctrine of future punishment, abstractedly considered from what the scriptures teach concerning it;* at least, from what they teach by the terms which professedly denote its duration. You require, that "there be something in the nature of future punishment, which necessarily leads us to receive the word αἰώνιος in an endless sense; in which case, (as you very properly add,) it is not the *word*, but the *subject* which gives the idea of endless duration."* What is this but saying, We are to make up our minds on the duration of future punishment, from the nature and fitness of things; and having done this, we are to understand the scripture terms which are designed to express that duration, accordingly? But, if we can settle this business without the aid of those scripture terms, why do we trouble them; and what is the meaning of all your criticisms upon them? If they are so "weak, from their vague and indeterminate application in scripture," that nothing certain can be gathered from them, why not let us alone? It should seem, as though all your critical labor

* Universalist's Miscellany, p. 329.

upon these terms, was for the sake of imposing silence upon them.

I do not know that endless punishment can be proved from the nature of things: but neither can it be disproved. Our ideas of moral government, and of the influence of sin upon it, are too contracted to form a judgment, *a priori*, upon the subject. It becomes us to listen, with humility and holy awe, to what is revealed in the oracles of truth, and to form our judgment by it. When I suggested that "the nature of the subject determined that the term *everlasting*, when applied to future punishment, was to be taken in the endless sense," I intended no more, than that such is the sense in which it is used when applied to a future state.

By your rule of interpretation, I have the "temerity" to say again, you might *disprove almost any thing you please.* I observed before, that if one should attempt to prove the divinity of the Son of God, or even of the Father, from his being called *Jehovah*, your mode of reasoning would render all such evidence of no account; because the same appellation is sometimes given to an altar, &c. You reply, by insisting, that you interpret this term by the *subject.* But, if you interpret it as you do the term αἰώνιος, it is not the name Jehovah that forms any part of the ground of your conclusion. You do not, on this principle, believe God to be self-existent from his being called Jehovah; but, that the name Jehovah means self-existent, because it is applied to God, whom, from other considerations, you know to be a self-existent being. If Christ were called Jehovah a thousand times, you could not, *on this account*, believe him to be the true God, according to your principle; because the same word, being applied to other things, its meaning can only be determined by the *subject;* and, in this case, as you say, it is not the word, but the subject, that gives the idea.

The rule adopted in my last Letter, allows a proper meaning to every scripture term, and does not attempt to set it aside in favour of one that is improper, or figurative, unless *the scope of the passage, or the nature of the subject require it.* This is a very different thing from *not admitting it, unless the subject, from its own nature, render it absolutely necessary.* The one is treating the proper meaning of a scripture word with respect, not dispensing with it, but upon

urgent necessity: the other is treating it with indignity, refusing it admission, except where it cannot be denied.

You refer me to Hab. iii. 6, as a parallel passage with Matt. xxv. 46, in which the same word is used, in the same text, in a different sense.* But these passages are not parallel: for there is no such antithesis in the one, as in the other. It has been thought, and, I apprehend, is capable of being proved, that the everlasting ways, or paths of God, denote those very goings forth by which he scattered the mountains, and caused the hills to bow; and, that the term everlasting, in both instances, is expressive of merely limited duration. But, admitting that the everlasting hills are opposed to the everlasting ways of God, or, that the one were only *lasting*, and the other properly *everlasting;* still, the antithesis, in this case, naturally directs us so to expound them; whereas in Matt. xxv. 46, it directs us to the contrary. If there be an opposition of meaning in the one case, it lies in the very term *everlasting;* or between the duration of the hills, and that of the divine ways: but the opposition in the other is between *life* and *punishment*, and the adjective everlasting, is applied in common to both; which, instead of requiring a different sense to be given to it, requires the contrary. The words recorded by Matthew, are parallel to those in John v. 29. *Some shall come forth to the resurrection of life, and some to the resurrection of damnation;* and we might as rationally contend for a different meaning to the term "resurrection" in the one case, as to the term "everlasting" in the other.

But, besides all this, by your manner of quoting the passage, you would induce one to suppose that you had taken it merely from the *English translation*, which, in a man of your pretensions, would be hardly excusable; for though the same word be twice used in the passage, yet it is not in those places which you have marked as being so: the instances which you have pointed out, as being the same word, are not the same, except in the *English translation.*

It was asked, Whether stronger terms could have been used concerning the duration of future punishment than those that are used? You answer, "The question ought not to be, what language God could have used; but, what is the meaning of that which he has

* Universalist's Miscellany, No. XXXV. p. 331.

used ?* I should have thought, it had been one way of ascertaining the strength of the terms that are used, to inquire whether they be equally strong with any which the language affords? Should this be the case, it must follow that, if they do not convey the idea of endless duration, it is not in the power of language, or, at least, of that language, to convey it.

You suggest a few examples, however, which, in your apprehension, would have been stronger, and which, if it had been the design of the Holy Spirit to teach the doctrine of endless punishment, might have been used for the purpose. "I refer you," say you, "to Heb. vii. 16, ἀκατάλυτος, *endless*, say our translators." "The word," you add, "is never connected in scripture with punishment, and but this once only with life; which, however, shows, that the sacred writers speak of future life in a different way than they do of punishment." (p. 334.) It is true, the term ἀκατάλυτος, is here applied to *life;* but not, as you insinuate, to that life of future happiness which is opposed to punishment. The life here spoken of, is that which pertains to our Lord's priesthood, which is opposed to that of Aaron, wherein men *were not suffered to continue, by reason of death.* The word signifies *indissoluble;* and, being applied to the nature of a priesthood which death could not *dissolve*, is very properly rendered *endless.* It possibly *might* be applied to the endless happiness of good men, as opposed to the *dissoluble*, or transitory enjoyments of the present state; but as to the punishment of the wicked, supposing it to be endless, I question whether it be at all applicable to it. I can form no idea how the term *indissoluble*, any more than *incorruptible*, can apply to punishment. The word καταλύω, *to unloose*, or *dissolve*, is true, is said to refer to travellers *loosing* their own burdens, or those of their beasts, when they are resting by the way: but there are no examples of its having been used with reference to the termination of punishment; nor does it appear to be applicable to it. In its most common acceptation in the New Testament, it signifies to *destroy*, or *demolish;* and you will scarce-

* Universalist's Miscellany, No. XXXV. p 334.

ly suppose the sacred writers to suggest the idea of a *destruction* which *cannot be destroyed.*

You offer a second example; referring me to Isa. xlv. 17. *Israel shall not be confounded, world without end:** but this is farther off still. In the first place, the phrase is *merely English;* and therefore affords no example of "Greek," for which it is professedly introduced. Secondly, It is not a translation from the Greek, but from the Hebrew. To have done any thing to purpose, you should have found a Greek word which might have been applied to punishment, stronger than αἰώνιος: or, if you must needs go to another language, you should have proved, that the Hebrew words in Isa. xlv. 17. which are applied to future happiness, are stronger than the Greek word αἰώνιος, which is applied to future punishment: but, if you had attempted this, your criticisms might not have perfectly accorded; as they are the same words which, you elsewhere tell us, would, if "literally rendered, be *age* and *ages;*"† and, therefore, are properly expressive of only a limited duration. And why did you refer us to the *Old* Testament? It could not be for the want of an example to be found in the New. You know, I dare say, that the English phrase, *world without end*, occurs in Ephes. iii. 21. And are the Greek words *there* used, stronger than αἰὼν, and its derivatives? On the contrary, they are the very words made use of; and in a plural form, too: εἰς πάσας τὰς γενεὰς τοῦ αἰῶνος τῶν αἰώνων, *throughout all ages, world without end.* Had these very terms been applied to future punishment, you would have pleaded for a different translation, and denied that they were expressive of endless duration.

Without pretending to any thing like a critical knowledge of either the Greek or Hebrew language, I can perceive, Sir, that all your arguments have, hitherto, been merely founded upon *English phraseology;* and, from your translating עד and עלם, *age* and *ages*,‡ as though one were the singular, and the other the plural: and εἰς

* Universalist's Miscellany, No. XXXV. p. 364.

† Universalist's Miscellany, No. XXXVI. p. 364. ‡ Ibid.

αἰῶνας αἰῶνών "to the *age* of ages," as though one, here also, were the singular, and the other the plural; as well as from your reference to ἀκατάλυτος, as a proper term to be applied to endless punishment; I am furnished with but little inducement to retract my opinion, that you had better not have meddled with these subjects.

Yours, &c.

A. F.

LETTER VII.

AN EXAMINATION OF MR. VIDLER'S SYSTEM, AND OF HIS ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT OF IT.

Sir

I have, certainly, to beg your pardon for having misunderstood you, with respect to the doctrine of *annihilation*. I did not observe how you opposed the idea of endless punishment on the one hand, and annihilation on the other. In this matter, I submit to your correction, and readily acquit you of all those absurdities which would have followed the admission of *that* principle. Other parts of that Letter, however, you have but but lightly touched; and some of them are entirely passed over.

As to your conjectures about my *motives*, both you and your friends might have been as well employed in something else. I can truly say, that I never wrote a line in my life with a view to "raise a dust" that might obscure the truth; and it is difficult to suppose, that any person, unless he himself had been in the habit of doing so, would have thought of imputing it to another.

It is my desire to understand you, and not to wrest any of your words to a meaning which they do not fairly include. I have endeavoured to collect your sentiments, as well as I am able. The amount of your first maxim, in p. 330, appears, to me, to be this: 'That if God created men, and placed them in circumstances which he certainly foreknew would issue in their fall and ruin, he willed this their fall and ruin; and this is of no importance that he forewarned them to avoid the evil: whatever be the event, he is chargeable with it.' 'But God,' you say, 'hath sworn by himself, that he willeth not the death of him who dieth; that is, he willeth it not as death finally or simply, or destruction irrecoverable. If, therefore, it occur, it is a part of his economy of grace, and, finally, a ministration unto life; for he hath declared, it is his

will that all should be saved: therefore, the doctrine which forges any contrary will, falsifies supreme, unchangeable truth.'

Thus, it seems, you reckon, that you acquit your Creator of injustice, which must, otherwise, attach to his character and conduct. Let us examine this matter. It is true, that whatever exists must, in some sense, accord with the will of God. Let the blasphemer make what use he may of it, it may be asked, Who hath resisted his will? God willeth not evil, however, as evil; but permits its existence, for wise ends. The good that shall arise from it, and not the evil, is the proper object of divine volition. But it is not true, that God is on this account chargeable with man's sin; that all his cautions and warnings are of no account; and that he is to be "accused" of the death of the sinner, if he die eternally. If it be, however, it is not the doctrine of Universal Salvation that will free him from the charge.

I am surprised, Sir, that you could allow yourself in this manner to reproach your Maker. You cannot allege all these things as merely attaching to my system. It is a fact, (is it not?) that God did place man in circumstances which he certainly foreknew would issue in his fall; and that he did, notwithstanding, caution and warn him against apostasy, and still continues to caution and warn sinners against those very sins which he certainly foreknows they will commit: Who, then, is this that dares to arraign his conduct, and to accuse him of insincerity?—Who, that, at one stroke, aims to sweep away the accoutableness of his creatures; and to charge him with the evil of their sin, on account of his having placed them in such circumstances?

If it be as you insinuate, it must follow, that man is not blameworthy in all his rebellion against his Maker, nor justly accountable for any of its consequences. Whether those consequences be *eternal*, makes nothing to the argument. Sin, and all the evils which follow upon it, are, by you, transferred from the sinner to the account of his Creator! State your supposition with reference to your principles: 'Suppose him about to create twenty men: he knows ten of them will become vicious, and, consequently, exposed to the tremendous penalty of damnation *for ages of ages*. Who doubts, in such a case, that he wills that penalty,

who, being almighty and all-knowing, does that without which it could not come to pass; and who will not accuse him of their damnation—having sent them into such circumstances?' Thus Sir, you undermine the justice of *all* punishment, present and future, and every principle of moral government.

Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God. Yes, says Mr. Vidler, it is he, who, knowing all events, and placing us in such circumstances as he does, that is accountable! And it is of no importance, in the consideration of common sense, that he cautions, or forewarns, us against the evil.

If what you have suggested be true, it must also follow, that there is no need of a mediator, or of forgiving mercy. Where there is no blame, it is an insult to talk of forgiveness, or of the need of a mediator to effect a reconciliation. All that is necessary to recover man, is justice. If the Creator only to be accountable for the evil, it belongs to him to remedy it. Thus, instead of supporting the doctrine of Universal Salvation, you undermine all salvation at the very foundation.

Think not that you shall be able to roll away this reproach, which you have had the temerity to charge on your Creator, by suggesting, that all the evil which follows will be ultimately a benefit; for still it follows, that man has not been blameworthy in sinning against God; that God has never been sincere in his cautions and warnings; and that, being accountable for the whole, it is but justice to man, that he turn all to his ultimate advantage, as a recompense for present injury. "He sent his children into the wood, it seems, where he knew the poisonous fruit abounded; and though he warned them against it, yet he was not in earnest; and when they had eaten, to the endangering of their lives, he counteracted the poison; but was conscious, at the same time, that, if there were any fault in the affair, it was his own; and if the children were to perish, he would be justly accused of their death." And can you, Sir, with these sentiments, continue to disavow your *invalidating the divine threatenings towards sinners;* and concurring with him who taught our first parents, "Ye shall not surely die?" What better exposition could the deceiver of mankind have wished for, than what your words afford! *Ye shall*

not surely die ; "namely, finally, or simply, or with destruction irrecoverable." *For God doth know, that in the day ye eat thereof, then shall your eyes be opened.* "If death occur, it is a part of his economy of grace, and finally a ministration unto life." That is, it shall prove a benefit.

"God hath sworn, that he willeth not the death of him that dieth. That is, he willeth it not as death finally, or simply, or destruction irrecoverable." Death simply and finally, then, means irrecoverable destruction, does it ? But, if it does so in this passage, it *may* in others ; and then the threatenings of death, provided they were put in execution, may mean eternal damnation. Yea, if death, in this passage, mean irrecoverable destruction, it will follow, that some are irrecoverably destroyed : for the death in which God taketh no pleasure, whatever it be, the sinner is supposed to suffer—He hath no pleasure in the death of *him that dieth.* God taketh no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, in the same sense as *he doth not afflict willingly*, nor grieve the children of men. It does not mean, that he doth not *afflict them ;* for this is contrary to fact : but he doth not afflict for affliction's sake, or for any pleasure that he takes in putting his creatures to pain. In all his dealings with sinners, he acts like a good magistrate, who never punishes from caprice, but for a good end ; in many cases for the correction of the party, and in all for the good of the community.

To your second maxim I have no objection—"That, whatever God does, is intended by his goodness, conducted by his wisdom, and accomplished by his power." But your application of it is inadmissible. Some parts of it are trifling ; others rest on unfounded assumptions ; and others are adapted to overthrow all future punishment.

First : The greater part of it is *mere trifling.*—Whoever supposed, that eternal punishment, or any punishment, was a *benefit* to God ; or even a *pleasure* to him, or any holy beings, for its own sake ? Or, who pretends, that it is inflicted for the *honour*, *pleasure*, or *benefit* of the sinner.

Secondly : Some parts of it which object to endless punishment, because it cannot be for the *honour* of God, or the *benefit* of crea-

tures, proceeds altogether upon *unfounded assumptions*.—The only proof you have offered for the *first* branch of this position is naked assertion, "that every unsophisticated heart would so determine." Suppose, I say, every unsophisticated heart would determine the contrary, my assertion would prove as much as yours: and, I may add, if *our* hearts be sophisticated, it must be by malignity, or the wish of having our fellow-creatures miserable; which I imagine, you will not generally impute to us. But, if *your* hearts be sophisticated, it is much more easily accounted for. The decision of sinful creatures, in such a case as this, is like that of a company of criminals, who should sit in judgment on the nature of the penalties to which they are exposed; whose prejudices are much more likely to cause them to err on the favourable, than on the unfavourable side.—The *second* branch of this position, is as unsupported as the first. Only one reason is alleged, and that is far from being an acknowledged truth; viz. That no possible good can arise to society from the punishment of sinners, but that of *safety*. Common sense and universal experience teach us, that this is not the only end of punishment. Israel might have been safe, if Pharaoh and his host had not been drowned; yet they were drowned. Was *safety* the only end answered to the world by the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrha; or were they not rather *set forth for an example?* Is it only for the *safety* of society, that a murderer is publicly executed? That end would be equally answered by perpetual imprisonment, or banishment, or a *private* execution: but there would be wanting an *example*, to express the displeasure of a good government against crimes, and to impress the public mind with it.

Thirdly: Most of what you say on this subject, if admitted, would overturn *all* future punishment. You might ask, Would it be honourable to God, to have any of his creatures miserable *for ages of ages*, rather than happy? Would it be a greater *pleasure? Benefit* he can have none; for there is no profit in their blood. As to the punished, future punishment can be neither honour nor pleasure to them: and, if their salvation could be accomplished without it, it cannot be any benefit to them. If they may not be saved without it, it must be either because there was not efficacy

enough in the blood of Christ for the purpose; or else, that "the full efficacy of the atonement was withheld by the divine determination." As to *fellow-creatures*, can the future punishment of any of the human race be any honour to them? Who ever thought it an honour to him, that any of his family were punished in any way? Is it not a dishonour to human nature at large to be sent to hell? Can any creature have *pleasure* in the punishment of another? Would not every benevolent mind possess a greater pleasure in seeing sinners converted and saved, without going to hell; than to see them condemned to weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, *for ages of ages?* Benefit they can have none, except *safety;* and that is better answered by their enmity being conquered in the present life. As, then, future torments can answer no possible good end to any one in the universe, I conclude them to be neither the work nor will of God; and, consequently, not the doctrine of scripture!

You "think there is a vast difference indeed, in the nature of future blessedness, and future punishment; such as fully to justify us in giving a very different sense to the word eternal, when applied to these subjects." (p. 331.) It may be so; but your thoughts prove nothing. "Sin and misery," you say, "have no root or foundation in God;" and, therefore, must come to an end. Awhile ago, they seemed to have their sole root in him, so much so as to exclude the accountableness of creatures; but, allowing they have not, this inference is a mere creature of the imagination. Reduce your argument to form, and see what it will amount to:—

Whatever has its root in the creature must come to an end:

But sin and misery have their root in the creature:

Therefore sin and misery must come to an end:

Now what proof, I ask, have you for your major proposition? None at all. It is an argument, therefore, without any medium of proof, founded upon mere imagination. Another, with equal plausibility, might imagine, that, as sin and misery had their origin in the present state, they will also terminate in the present state; and, consequently, that there will be no future punishment. And another might imagine, that, as the acts of human beings are performed within a few years, the effects of them upon society can-

not extend much farther; and, consequently, it is absurd to suppose, that a whole nation still feels the consequence of what was transacted in a few hours at Jerusalem, nearly 1800 years ago; and a whole world, of what was wrought, perhaps, in less time in the garden of Eden. In short, there are no bounds to the imagination, and will be no end to its absurdities, if it go on in this direction. If, instead of taking our religion from the Bible, we labour to form a system from our own ideas of fitness and unfitness, and interpret the Bible accordingly, there will be no end of our wanderings.

Because all judgment is committed to the Son, you conclude, that future punishment has its origin in mercy, and will end in eternal salvation. To this I answer, First: If it be owing to the mediation of Christ, that punishment should be a work of mercy, this is allowing, that if no mediator had been provided, it must have been the reverse. But, if so, all your arguments against eternal punishment from the divine perfections, and all your attempts to maintain that the original meaning of the divine threatenings never included this idea, are given up. Secondly: If whatsoever is done by Christ in his mediatorial capacity shall terminate, on his delivering up the kingdom to the Father; the rewards of the righteous, as well as the punishments of the wicked, must, at that period, come to an end: for he will equally confer the one, as inflict the other. The "execution of judgment" committed to the Son, denotes, not merely the carrying into execution the sentence at the last day, but the general administration of God's moral government, both in this world and that which is to come. See Jer. xxiii. 5. xxxiii. 15. Matt. xii. 18—20.

You talk of our "ascribing a proper eternity to sin and misery," as if we considered sin and misery to be necessarily eternal. The existence of intelligent creatures is no more eternal, than their moral qualities or sensations; and, therefore, it would be improper to ascribe eternity either to the one or the other: but, if God perpetuates the existence of intelligent beings to an endless duration, he may also perpetuate their moral qualities to the same extent; whether they originated with their existence, or were acquired at any subsequent period. Holiness and happiness, in

respect to creatures, are not necessarily eternal, any more than sin and misery; and, in this view, it would be as improper to ascribe eternity to the purity and blessedness of the saved, as to the sin and misery of the lost, seeing, that the endless duration of both depends upon the will of God. You speak of the "life and blessedness of holy beings, as having their root and foundation in God; and that, being thus grounded in him, they will be, like him, eternal in duration." But this position is contrary to fact; for was not "God the source and proper spring, both of the life and blessedness" of the unsinning angels? Yet they *kept not their first estate*, but lost their blessedness, and *are reserved in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day.* The life and blessedness of man in a state of innocence, had their origin in God, as well as those of saints and angels; yet they were not, on this account, like their Author, "eternal in duration." To make such an assertion is, "to say the least of it, an unguarded mode of expression:" but, more than this, it is contrary to fact, and tends to lessen the dependence of creatures upon God as the constant author of all their happiness. The argument to prove that sin and misery cannot be eternal, is the counterpart of the above position; and, of course, it is equally fallacious.

"Sin and misery being contrary to the holiness and benevolence of God, they must (it seems) come to an end." Such an assertion is soon made: but where is the proof? A little more assurance might lead another to say, that sin and misery, being contrary to the holiness and benevolence of God, cannot *exist* in a future state: and, were it not for the awful evidence of facts, another might assert, that sin and misery do not *now* exist; for, in theory, it would be as easy to prove, that the present existence of sin and misery is as contrary to the holiness and benevolence of God, as their existence in future; and that their existence, in future, *for ages of ages*, is as contrary to the holiness and benevolence of God, as their existence to an endless duration. By such kind of reasoning, some men have become Atheists, because they cannot reconcile the present state of things with their ideas of a superintending power, possessed of infinite holiness and benevolence; and I cannot but tremble for the man who begins to travel in this

unwary path, by measuring the divine administration by his own unhallowed notions of moral fitness.

If your attempts to prove that all judgment is a work of mercy, and yet that there may be *judgment without mercy*, should prove fruitless, it is no more than may be expected; for the thing itself is a contradiction. "The scriptures afford instances of punishment and pardon to the same persons, and for the same sins:"* but was this punishment *without mercy?* "Judgment and mercy were united in God's dealings with Jerusalem."† Granted: but, for this very reason, it could not be *judgment without mercy.* You might as well allege the union of wisdom and righteousness in all the works of God as a proof that there are some works in which wisdom will be exercised without righteousness!

In another Letter, Sir, I hope to conclude these remarks. Meanwhile I am

Yours, &c.

A. F.

* Universalist's Miscellany, p. 337. † Ibid. p. 338.

LETTER VIII.

A FARTHER EXAMINATION OF MR. VIDLER'S SCHEME, WITH REPLIES TO HIS ANIMADVERSIONS.

Sir,

I do not know whether I fully understand your remarks on *proper eternity.* (p. 364.) It is, certainly, one of those ideas in which the human mind is easily lost; as it infinitely surpasses our comprehension: but, whether "the scriptures have revealed any thing past or to come, besides what is connected with successive duration;" and, whether we be "left to infer a *proper eternity* only from the nature of Deity;" are other questions. You will allow that the scriptures *attribute* a proper eternity to the Divine Being, and to his all-comprehending purposes; which, I should think, is not leaving us to *infer* it from his nature. They speak also of a period when *God shall be all in all;* when the *end* cometh; and of the *end of all things* being at hand. They Likewise promise an inheritance that shall *be without end.* I should think, therefore, that this inheritance, of which the New Testament speaks very fully, cannot be said to be connected with successive duration; not so connected, however, as to be commensurate with it.

By successive duration being ended, I meant no more than what I apprehended you must mean by the cessation of *day and night,* (No. I. p. 8.) and the state of things when Christ shall have delivered up the kingdom to the Father. Strictly speaking, it may be true, that the idea of successive duration necessarily attaches, and ever will attach, to the existence of creatures; and that none but God can be said to exist without it: but there is a period, by your own acknowledgment, when the states of creatures will be for ever fixed; and if, at this period, sinners be doomed to everlasting punishment, the term "everlasting" must be understood to mean endless duration This period I conceive to be at the last judgment: you extend it to ages beyond it. Here, therefore is our difference. I did not allege Rev. x. 6. in favour of there being an end

of time. I did not apprehend it needed proof. Your formal answer to it, therefore, is only removing an objection of your own creating; and, if designed to prove that time will have no end, it is as contrary to your own avowed principles, as to mine.

You contend, that "the day of judgment is not the finishing period of Christ's kingdom;" for which you offer a number of reasons. To the greater part of them I have already replied. The rest I shall briefly consider:—

This earth (which is to be the hell of wicked men, 2 Pet. iii. 7—13.) is to be renewed, whereby hell itself will be no more."* If the gloss will bear the test, you have certainly, for once, hit upon a clear proof of your point; for none can imagine the conflagration to be eternal. But, First: the scriptures speak of a hell *already existing*, wherein the angels who kept not their first estate are *reserved in everlasting chains, unto darkness, unto the judgment of the great day;* and in which the departed spirits of wicked men *lift up their eyes, being in torment;* and intimate, that this, whatsoever and wherever it be, will be the hell of ungodly men: for they are doomed to depart into everlasting fire, *prepared for the devil and his angels.* But this cannot be upon earth; as its present condition does not admit of it.

Secondly: If the earth, as being dissolved by fire, is to be the hell of ungodly men, their punishment must *precede* the day of judgment, instead of following it: for the conflagration is uniformly represented as prior to that event. It is described, not as your scheme supposes, as taking place a thousand years after Christ's second coming; but as attending it. The *day of the Lord's coming* is the same as *the day of God*, which Christians look for, and hasten to; WHEREIN *the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved. —Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him;* and all this, previous to his giving orders for his saints to be *gathered unto him.* And thus we are taught, by the apostle Paul, that *the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven* IN FLAMING FIRE.†

Thirdly: I appeal to the judgment of the impartial reader, whether, by the *perdition* of ungodly men, be not meant the des-

* Universalist's Miscellany, No. XXXVI. p. 365.

† 2 Pet. ii. 7, 12, 13. Psa. l. 2 Thes. i. 7, 8.

truction of their *lives*, and not of their *souls?* It is spoken of in connexion with the deluge, and intimated, that, as the ungodly were then destroyed from the face of the earth by water, in like manner they should now be destroyed by fire.

You plead the promise, that "every knee shall bow to Christ," and consider this as inconsistent with "a stubborn knee, even in hell.' But the question is, Whether the bowing of the knee to Christ be necessarily expressive of a *voluntary* and *holy* submission to him? The same inspired writer applies the language to that universal conviction which shall be produced at the last judgment, when every mouth will be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God. *We shall all stand* (saith he) *before the judgment seat of Christ: for it is written as I live saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.*† But you will not pretend, that every knee will, *in that day*, bow to Christ in a way of voluntary submission.

"All things," you allege, "are to be reconciled to the Father by the blood of the cross: but, while any continue in enmity against God, this can never be performed." (p. 364.) You refer, I suppose, to Col. i. 19, 20. But, if the reconciliation of things in earth, and things in heaven, denote the salvation of all the inhabitants of heaven and earth, it would follow: (1.) That the holy angels are *saved*, as well as the unholy; though, in fact, they never sinned. (2.) That when the Apostle adds, *And you that were sometime alienated, and enemies in your minds by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled*, he deals in unmeaning tautology. Things in heaven, and things in earth, were at variance through sin. Men becoming the enemies of God, all his faithful subjects, and all the works of his hands; were at war with them; yea, they were at variance with each other. But, through the blood of Christ, all things are reconciled; and, under his headship, all made to subserve the present and everlasting good of them who believe in him. Such appears, to me, to be the meaning of the passage, and which involves neither of the foregoing absurdities.

† Rom. xiv. 10—12.

"Christ," you add, "is to rule till his enemies are *subdued;* till there be no authority, power, or dominion, but what shall be subservient to him; and, as the wages of sin is death, the second death must be here included." (p. 365.) This language, which is taken from 1 Cor. xv. is manifestly used in reference to the resurrection of the bodies of those that sleep in Jesus, which is an event that precedes the last judgment; for WHEN *this corruptible shall have put on incorruption*—THEN *shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory;* which is the same thing as *the last enemy being destroyed.* And THEN *cometh the end,* the last judgment, and the winding up of all things, WHEN *he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority, and power.* (ver. 24, 25.) For you to interpret this language, of things that are to *follow the last judgment,* and to say that it *must* include the second death, proves nothing, but the dire necessity to which your system reduces you.

"Finally: the character of God is LOVE; which is expressly against the horrible idea of the endless misery of any of his rational creatures." (p. 395.) So, Sir, you are pleased to assert. Another might, from the same premises, infer, that the punishment of any of his rational creatures in hell, for ages of ages, where there shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth (and this, notwithstanding the death of his Son, and the omnipotence of his grace, which surely was able to have saved them from it,) is horrible and incredible! Is it inconsistent with the benevolence of a supreme magistrate, that he dooms certain characters to death? Rather, is it not an exercise of his benevolence? Should a malefactor persuade himself and his companions in guilt, that his majesty cannot possibly consent to their execution, without ceasing to be that lovely and good character for which he has been famed, would not his reasoning be as false in itself as it was injurious to the king? Nay; would it not be inimical to his own interest, and that of his fellow criminals; as by raising a delusive hope, they are prevented from making a proper and timely application to the throne for mercy?

Such are your reasons for successive duration, and final salvation after the last judgment; which, whether they ought to satisfy any other person, let the reader judge. I shall close with replies to a few of your animadversions.

Your misrepresentation of what I had advanced concerning the Jews as a distinct nation, I should hope needs no correction. If any of your readers can mistake what you have said, for a just statement of the views, or an answer to the argument of your opponent, they are beyond the reach of reasoning.

You inferred, from what was God's end in punishing Israel *in the present life*, that, (seeing he was an immutable being,) it must be the same in his punishing others in the life to come.* I answered, that I might as well infer, from what appears to be his end in punishing Pharaoh and Sodom in the present life, which was not their good, but the good of others, that such will be the end of future punishment.† You reply by supposing that these characters were destroyed for their good. (p. 367. What, *in the present life?* No; but in the life to come! and do you call this reasoning?

You say, "If any be finally incorrigible, it must be in consequence of the divine purpose; or else the purpose of God has been fustrated." I have in my last letter, replied to the substance of this dilemma. I may add, you need be under no apprehension, that I shall be tempted to give up the infrustableness of the divine purpose; and if I admit, that God, in just judgment, has purposed to give some men up to stumble, and fall, and perish, it is no more than the scriptures abundantly teach. You talk of "the LAST state of a creature according with the divine purpose:" but I know of no evidence for this, which does not equally apply to every state. If you be tempted to ask, *Why does he yet find fault; for who hath resisted his will?* you may possibly recollect, that these questions have been asked before and answered too; and it may be of use to you to study the answer.

Akin to this is your dilemma, "That God cannot, or will not, make an end of sin; that there is not efficacy enough in the blood of Christ, to destroy the works of the devil; or else, that the full efficacy of the atonement is withheld by the divine determination."

* Universalist's Miscellany, No. II. pp. 43, 44. † Ibid No. XXXII. p. 262.

It has been already observed, and I hope proved, that the scripture phrases, *making an end of sin, &c.* convey no such idea as you attach to them. (p. 264.) And as to your dilemma, to which you ascribe great "weight," I answer again, you need be under no apprehensions of my limiting the power of God, or the efficacy of the Saviour's blood; and, if I say, that both the one and the other are applied under the limitation of his own infinite wisdom, I say, not only what the scriptures abundantly teach, but what you yourself must admit. Can you pretend, that your scheme represents God as doing all he can do, and as bestowing all the mercy which the efficacy of the Saviour's blood has rendered consistent? If so you must believe that God cannot convert more than he actually does in the present life, and that the efficacy of the blood of Christ is not equal to the saving of more than a part of mankind from the second death.

You think, that "the scripture is not silent concerning the future emendation of the ancient Sodomites;" and refer me to Ezek. xvi. 44—63; arguing, that "Sodom and her daughters must be taken literally for the city of Sodom, and the neighboring cities of the plain; that the prophecy must refer to the very persons who were destroyed, seeing they left no descendants; and that there is the same reason to expect the restoration of Sodom, as the fulfilment of God's gracious promises towards Jerusalem." (p. 368.) But, if your interpretation prove any thing, it will prove—I will not say, too much, but too little. It will prove, not that the ancient Sodomites will be saved from "the vengeance of eternal fire," and introduced into the heavenly world; but, barely, that they are to return to their former estate. (ver. 55.) And do you seriously think, that, *after the last judgment*, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha, of Samaria and Jerusalem, will be rebuilt, and repossessed by their ancient inhabitants? If so, it is time for me to lay down my pen.

The former part of the above passage, (ver. 46—59.) I apprehended to be no promise; but the language of keen reproof: and, instead of intimating a return to either Sodom or Jerusalem, the latter is reckoned with on the footing of her own deserts, and told,

in effect, not to expect it, any more than the former.* The later part (ver. 60—63.) contains the language of free mercy; not however, towards the same individuals against whom the threatnings are directed, but to their distant posterity, who, under the gospel dispensation, should be brought home to God; and by a new and better covenant, have the Gentiles given to them. The conversion of the heathen is expressed by this kind of language more than once; as by *bringing again the captivity of Moab. of Elam, and of the children of Ammon in the latter days.* Jer. xlviii. 47. xlix. 6. 39.

You "have not discernment enough, it seems, to perceive the gross absurdity" of maintaining that there can be no diversity in future punishment, unless it be in duration; that is, that the reflections of sinners on their past life must all be exactly the same. It may be so; but I cannot help it. Your answer amounts to this: Diversity of degrees in future punishment *may* be accounted for, by varying the duration of it; "for every one knows there needs not so much time to inflict a hundred stripes, as to inflict ten times that number." Therefore, that *must* be the way, and the *only* way; and if you do not admit it, you "confound all degrees of punishment, in giving infinite punishment to all." (pp. 42. 264. 369.)

You believe, you say, "*those who die in their sins cannot go where Christ is.*" You must mean to say merely, that they *cannot follow him* NOW, *but shall follow him* AFTERWARDS. Such things, indeed, are said of Christ's friends, but not of his enemies.

You have represented me as maintaining, that all punishment clashes with the benevolence "both of God and his people." I have said no such thing concerning God: and if we were equally wise and righteous, and equally concerned to guard the interests of the universe, as he is, we should be, in all respects, of the same mind with him. The misery which I suppose true benevolence to clash with, is misery inflicted for its own sake: and to this, whether it be temporary or endless, it is alike abhorrent. God has also made it *our* duty, while sinners are not his confirmed

* See a similar kind of phraseology in Jer. xxxiii. 19—26.

enemies, to do all in our power to preserve their lives, and save their souls: but *He* is not obliged to do all that he can to these ends, nor does he. Temporary punishment, you contend, may consist with benevolence, "because it is directed to a good and glorious end:" and do I contend for endless punishment on any other principle? If you can form no idea of an end that is good and glorious, save that which respects "the amendment of the sufferer," it does not follow that no such end exists. A murderer, contemplating his approaching exit, might be so much absorbed in the love of himself, as to be of your opinion; but the community would not.

Whether I have entered into "the merits of the cause," or conducted the controversy in a becoming "spirit," I consider as no part of my province to determine. The impartial reader will judge, whether I have dealt in "soft words, or hard arguments;" and if, in this particular, I have been so happy as to follow your counsel, whether I have not been obliged to deviate from your example. On this account, I shall be excused from taking any notice of your animadversions on these subjects, together with those of your ally, the "Hoxtot Student," unless it be to thank you, for affording additional proof of the justness of my remark, *That Socinians rejoice in the spread of Universalism.*

Whether the kingdom of heaven be prepared for all men, or not, that you and I may so agonize, in the present life, as at last to enter in, is the desire and prayer of your sincere well-wisher,

A. F.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.